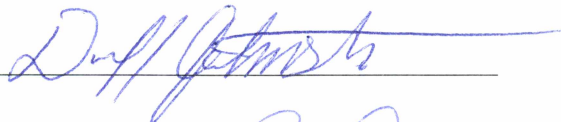


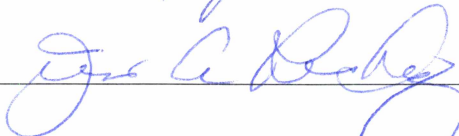
“MY LANGUAGE, YOUR LANGUAGE”:  
THAI MOTHERS’ EXPECTATIONS FOR THEIR CHILDREN’S HERITAGE  
LANGUAGE USAGE

By

Janejira Piyamahapong

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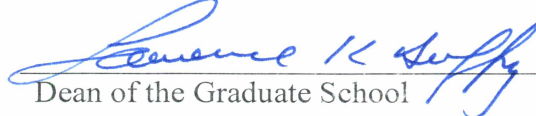
  
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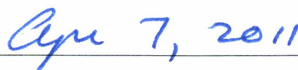
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“MY LANGUAGE, YOUR LANGUAGE”:  
THAI MOTHERS’ EXPECTATIONS FOR THEIR CHILDREN’S HERITAGE  
LANGUAGE USAGE

A  
THESIS

Presented to the Faculty  
of the University of Alaska Fairbanks  
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By  
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### **Abstract**

Immigrant parents who share the same ethnic background usually have high expectations and positive attitudes toward their children's heritage language usage. They are willing to put their time, money, and other effort in order to pass their heritage language on to their second-generation children. This research looked at some of the cross-cultural marriage couples—Thai mother and American father, who together have U.S. born children, and the mothers' expectations for their children's heritage language usage. Specifically, it examined these mothers' lived experience through conversational interviewing. Thematic analysis was utilized as data analysis. Four major themes emerged during the analysis of data: (a) It's my child's future, I want the best for them, (b) I was struggling when I first moved here, (c) This is OUR language, and (d) Embarrassment and resistance. These themes allowed and structured the results of this study. Directions for future research include a study incorporating American fathers and mother's education.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Review of Related Literature**

#### ***1.1 Statement of the Problem***

According to United States Census Bureau (2010), the United States has a total resident population of 308 million. At the beginning of the twentieth century, one out of eight Americans was of a race other than White; at the end of the century, the ratio was one out of four. As of 2008, the white population was 75% of the entire U.S. population; however, U.S. Census Bureau (2008) projects that non-Hispanic whites will no longer make up the majority of the population by 2042. This shows that the United States is one of the fastest growing countries in the world in terms of the diversity in its population. As the number of immigrants increases, there are more people in the U.S.'s society who are not native English speakers. These people bring different attitudes, beliefs, needs, values, and expectations into American society. Some of the different expectations they share include expectations toward language use in everyday life. Most non-English speaking immigrants maintain the use of their heritage language in their everyday life; however, second generation immigrants tend to lose the ability to use their heritage language.

I am part of the third generation with respect to my grandparents who migrated from China to Thailand when they were adults. My parents are capable of speaking both Chinese and Thai. However, I do not speak Chinese. There are some Chinese words that I know, but I am far from being fluent in the language. Even though my grandparents could speak some Thai, many times we had a hard time understanding each other. I felt embarrassed for not understanding what my grandparents were telling me, and I am

positive that my grandparents must have felt the same way when they could not understand other people who spoke Thai to them. “Mom, what did grandma just say to me?” was a typical question that my brother and I often used when we visited our grandparents’ house. For me, it does not feel right to have a translator for my own grandparents. I should be able to speak to them naturally. I am their granddaughter—we are family. I used to ask my parents for the reasons why they did not teach me Chinese. “This Chinese dialect is not widely used. It’s not going to be useful for you in the future. Not many people use this particular dialect; you don’t need to learn it,” was my parents’ answer. At the time, I did not know how many Chinese dialects there were, although I heard Chinese-Thai people who reside in Thailand speak this particular dialect. If I had known the language, I would have been closer to my grandparents. My situation makes me wonder about Thai immigrants who move to Alaska. What are the expectations Thai parents have regarding the languages their U.S. born children will learn? Do they want them to learn both languages? How do they feel if their children learn English, but not much Thai? Do these parents feel completely blocked out of their children’s lives because of the language barrier between them, as I am blocked out of my grandparents’ lives? Even though there is plenty of research about attitudes towards heritage languages and about how much effort immigrant parents are willing to make in order to pass the heritage language on to the second generation, relatively little is known about parents’ expectations in cross-cultural marriage couples where the fathers are American and the mothers are from a different culture and speak a different native language.

The demographic of the United States of America has changed from a melting pot to a salad bowl. The melting pot is a metaphor for a heterogeneous society that is becoming a more homogeneous society. In the past, people from different cultures were expected to assimilate to a common culture—American culture. Diversity of languages and attitudes towards heritage language usage were regarded as a problem, rather than as a benefit or resource for the host society. The salad bowl metaphor, on the other hand, cherishes cultural differences, including language differences, within society. However, while there has been an increase in immigrants, research on attitudes toward heritage languages, especially the actual lived experiences of those immigrants, has been undervalued. Furthermore, although language attitudes are recognized as an important factor in language use, meaning the more positive the attitude towards one's language, the more likely one would prefer using that language, little research has been done directly to understand the attitudes held by cross-cultural marriage immigrants toward their heritage language.

Heritage language loss is seen everywhere, not only among immigrants who move to the United States, but also among Native people who have resided in the United States for a very long time, such as Native Alaskan people. At the moment, young Native Alaskans for the most part only learn English in school and use English as their first language instead of their heritage language. Loss of heritage languages is an important problem for which some explanation is needed.

In this research, I examine the lived experiences of Thai mothers who are married to American husbands and have U.S. born children. I am interested in what their

expectations are regarding their children's Thai language use. My parents believed that the Chinese dialect was not going to be useful for me in the future. Therefore, they did not teach me Chinese. I am interested in what these Thai mothers think about Thai language—their heritage language. It is my belief that by looking at Thai immigrants in Fairbanks, Alaska, and their expectations and experience regarding the language used by the second generation, I may better understand why things are the way they are, and provide insight that applies to other groups of people, such as Native Alaskans, regarding their language maintenance and loss.

### ***1.2 Review of the Literature***

Noro (1990) investigated the relationships between the language experiences of Japanese children, specifically their Japanese language maintenance, and their family environments. Participants consisted of ninety families whose children were in Japanese-language schools in Toronto, Canada. There were two schools; school A was designed for children of employees of Japanese business firms, and school B was founded by Japanese postwar immigrants. The results showed that children whose parents use Japanese more often tended to maintain their Japanese language better than those children whose parents who used Japanese less often. Schooling also had significant effect on the children's language development. Children from school A used Japanese more often than those children in school B. One explanation for this result was because school A followed curricula developed by the Ministry of Education in Japan, so that when these business people and their families returned to Japan, these children would have the same standards of academic achievement as children in Japan. Students in school A spent more time

during the week studying Japanese, and other subjects in Japanese. On the other hand, students from school B only spent three hours per week studying the Japanese language. Lastly, the results indicated that the parents' social position or the father's occupation had a significant effect on the children's Japanese language development. Particularly, the children whose fathers were either employed in Japanese companies or dealt with Japanese products used Japanese language more often than those children whose fathers were employed by Canadian companies or self-employed (p. 63).

According to Nesteruk (2010), second generation children typically become English-dominant or even English monolingual by the time they reach adolescence. The most significant factors that help maintaining heritage language among children of immigrants are that they have parents who share the same native language and use it at home, and that they have friends of the same origin and supportive ethnic networks (p.273). Additionally, the study, which focused on European immigrants in the USA, showed that the parents had positive attitudes towards the heritage languages. This based research interview indicated that it was easier to transmit heritage language to young children, but very difficult to maintain the language during the adolescent years due to pressures that these children have from schoolwork and the parents' desire to preserve a strong parent-child connection. Some parents reported that their adolescent children felt uncomfortable discussing their life issues in their heritage language, therefore, if the parents kept forcing them to speak the heritage language, these children might just stop discussing the issues and they would lose parent-child connection. Most of the parents in this study were highly educated and had high expectations for their children's academic

achievements. They reported that in order to be successful academically, their children must master English; therefore, they also spoke English at home with their children. Moreover, parents reported that ethnic community resources were very crucial in maintaining their children's heritage language. Many parents sent their children to ethnic-based daycare centers, schools, and language classes, and had nannies that were of the same ethnic group. These results showed that even though parents share the same native language and speak it at home, their children may still lose the heritage language due to external pressures, lack of ethnic community support, and desire for children to be successful in academics.

Park and Sarkar (2007) explored Korean parents' attitudes toward heritage language maintenance for their children and their efforts to help their children maintain the heritage language. The study revealed that parents would like to have their children attain high proficiency in their Korean in order to keep their identity as Koreans, better economic opportunities, and efficient communication within their own ethnic community. All parents had positive attitudes toward their children's heritage language maintenance. This study was done in Montreal, Canada, where French and English are both majority languages. Korean-Canadian children are thus exposed to three languages, including their heritage language. Some parents admitted that it was very difficult to teach Korean language to their children since their children's study load in learning two majority languages was already a big challenge. Accordingly, some parents were unwilling to force their children to learn the Korean language if the children were reluctant. On the other hand, some parents revealed that the trilingual situation was

beneficial instead of being a burden on parents and children. They reported that because of these two majority languages, their children could easily recognize the importance of multilingualism in a multicultural society at an early age. Most of the parents reported that the parents' positive attitude toward the Korean language was the most important factor in making their children maintain the heritage language. Additionally, their expectations for their children's proficiency level in the Korean language were very high. The researchers explained that the Korean immigrant parents' effort to enhance children's Korean language skills were to use Korean as much as possible with their children, to read the Korean books together with their children, and to have their children talk with their grandparents in Korea.

Similarly, Zhang and Slaughter-Defoe (2009) explored Chinese immigrant parents' attitudes toward heritage language maintenance and the efforts that these parents engaged in to promote their children's use of Chinese in the USA. The study showed that, in general, Chinese immigrant parents have highly positive attitudes toward their heritage language. Some parents believed that Chinese is an important resource that their children could take advantage of in their academic advancement and future career, while other parents recognized Chinese language as important to their ethnic identity, and some parents saw the native language as a necessary family link that reinforced family ties (p. 83). Most Chinese immigrant parents in the study who had earned either master's or doctoral degrees had high expectations for their children's future. They expected their children to get a doctoral degree where a foreign language was required, one of which could be Chinese. Furthermore, many parents in the study reported that in the future, their

children could take advantage of being bilingual in order to get a good job.

The researchers found that the sense of ethnic identity was very strong among these Chinese immigrants. Often, clear ethnic distinction places immigrants at a disadvantage in the host country. However, the Chinese parents seem to be proud in their ethnicity, culture, and language. Some of the parents emphasized that it is a shame if a Chinese cannot speak Chinese because they tended to see the Chinese language itself as the key characteristic of their ethnic group. Chinese language was viewed as a tie in Chinese families, however some parents who did not have high English language proficiency revealed that they did not understand their children's schoolwork, and that their children were not able to explain to them in Chinese because their Chinese language proficiency had not reached a level that allowed them to explain schoolwork and school-related activities to their parents.

Directly parallel to Park and Sarkar (2007), Zhang and Slaughter-Defoe (2009) also found that those Chinese parents who reported that they spoke Chinese at home consistently, especially after their children went to school, were more effective in maintaining the heritage language in their children. Moreover, these Chinese parents also put much effort into attempting to immerse their children in Chinese-speaking environments such as Chinese weekend schools and cultural participation, where their children would be exposed to other Chinese-speaking speakers.

With strong positive attitudes toward the heritage language, many parents are willing to spend considerable time, money, and energy to help their children to maintain their heritage language. However, despite these efforts, not many children see the



heritage language as important (Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009). Their study showed that most Chinese children, especially older children between the age of 10 and 13 years old, felt that Chinese was something they had to learn to obey their parents, but they did not feel it necessary or important. According to the researchers' observations, younger children in the lower grades were usually happy and willing to learn the heritage language. Weekend school usually provided these children with games and activities that were interesting and entertaining to them. However, as time went by, their interest and eagerness to learn Chinese decreased. The researchers reported that they saw learning language attitudes change as these children matured and moved up the ladder of education in American schools. The majority of children reported that they think Chinese is a difficult language to learn and they would rather enjoy their weekend with their friends. Their interviews with these older children revealed that these children did not feel that their heritage language was a resource for their future because they lived in the United States where people speak English. Some children reported that their friends would make fun of them if the friends heard them speak Chinese.

The notion of the heritage language being useless is common in second generation children. Shi and Lu (2007) pointed out that both internal and external forces pressure immigrant children toward an English language preference. The internal force is the desire for social inclusion and conformity, whereas the external factors are the sociopolitical beliefs that operate against outsiders and those who are different. Therefore, when children recognize that English language is the only socially accepted language, they begin to think that their heritage language is useless.

Worthy (2006) revealed that immigrants believe that their own personal, social, and economic quality of life would be greatly enhanced by knowing English. Some of the participants in his study described the feelings of barriers between themselves and their children because of their limited English language proficiency. Children sometimes would start speaking in English when they want to keep the topic a secret from their parents. The feeling of depending too much on their children is frustrating because parents want to feel that their children rely on them, not them rely on their children. These beliefs serve as a drive immigrant parents to start learning English and to try to speak English with anyone, including their own children.

As stated earlier, there is much research about immigrant parents' attitudes and expectations toward their children's heritage language learning. Even though it is known that most immigrant parents are eager to transmit their heritage language to their children and expect these children to use and maintain the language, there is little knowledge about cross-cultural marriage couples' heritage language attitudes and expectations for their children. Since the invention of internet, cross-cultural marriages are increasing day by day. Many families in the U.S. have an American father and an immigrant mother. As one initial step in examining this issue, this study will explore the attitudes and expectations of Thai mothers in cross-cultural marriages toward their children's heritage language usage. Although, there does not seem to be a theory that can explain cross-cultural marriage couples' attitudes and expectations toward heritage language, one can anticipate what Thai mothers might be going through by utilizing Kim's (2004) *cross-cultural adaptation theory* and Phinney's (1992) *components model of ethnic and*

*cultural identities.*

### ***1.3 Theoretical Framework***

#### ***1.3.1 Cross-Cultural Adaptation***

Cross-cultural adaptation is a desirable goal for individual immigrants, as well as for the host society. Without the cross-cultural adaptation, the host society will not be cohesive, and the individual immigrants will have a more difficult time functioning effectively in that society. Kim's (2004) cross-cultural adaptation theory defines "cross-cultural adaptation" as "the entirety of the phenomenon of individuals who, upon relocating to an unfamiliar sociocultural environment, strive to establish and maintain a relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationship with the environment" (p. 380). According to Kim, cross-cultural adaptation is a universal phenomenon—it is much like any other common process of environmental adaptation as "it entails the totality of a complex, dynamic, and evolutionary process an individual undergoes" (p. 378). Kim explains that each person moving to another environment is likely to face an internal struggle to regain control over their life in a new, unfamiliar, and challenging environment, which may include a new job, and a new language (if their primary language is not that of their new country).

Cross-cultural adaptation is not a specific analytic unit, but instead is a dynamic process of an individual encountering a new environment. This process involves not only external forces from the environment that set limits on individual's adaptive behavior, but also internal forces within the individual. Kim's (2004) theory describes cross-cultural adaptation as a process that happens in and through communication activities. Without

communication, adaptation cannot take place. Cross-cultural adaptation occurs as long as the individual keeps interacting with the host environment, stopping only when the individual completely stops interacting. This theory can serve as an explanation regarding culture change, as well as language shift, in many immigrants and immigrant children. To illustrate, some Thai mother immigrants who move to Alaska probably desire to be a part of the new society and would like to be accepted into the new culture, so they chose to speak English with everyone including their children. Some Thai mothers might think that to be able to get a good job in Alaska, they should be able to speak English, therefore, they chose to speak English most of the time.

The concept of cross-cultural adaptation is that each individual begins their adaptation after resettling in a new culture as a cultural “outsider,” and moves in the direction of becoming a cultural “insider” over time. There are three boundary conditions that define this cross-cultural adaptation theoretical domain: 1) the outsiders must have had a primary communal socialization in one culture and have moved and settled into an unfamiliar culture, 2) the outsiders are dependent on the host environment for achieving their personal and social needs, at least minimally, and 3) the outsiders are engaged in communicating with that environment (Kim, 2004, p. 381). Note that this concept applies not only to immigrants who resettle in the United States, but also to Americans who face significant changes in domestic sociocultural environment, such as through demographic changes in the surrounding environment from incoming and outgoing population movements.

Enculturation is a process whereby individuals learn their group's culture through experience, observation, and instruction. Everybody learns to relate to the social and cultural environment from birth, and as they grow up, through continuous interaction with that environment. According to Kim (2004), entering a new culture is the same as starting an enculturation process all over again. However, this time individuals encounter situations that depart from an accepted norm or standard of their original culture. Furthermore, this new process of enculturation can generate crises because strangers discover that they are not able to communicate with other people in the new communication system of the host society, or discover that they will not be able to survive in the new environment if they do not adapt themselves. Sometimes they may be "forced to suspend or even abandon their identification with the cultural patterns that have symbolized who they are and what they are" (p. 382). For example, Worth (2006) revealed that an immigrant who had owned a modest plumbing business in Mexico, worked as a plumber's assistant when he moved to the United States. He had to abandon his identification of being a business owner and become an assistant because of his lack of English communication skills. Kim explains that "acculturation is not a process in which new cultural elements are simply added to prior internal conditions" (p. 382). Once new learning occurs, unlearning or deculturation of some of the prior cultural elements must occur as well. If non-English speaking adult immigrants do not try to change the way they communicate by getting out of their immediate society, which is full of immigrants who speak the same language, and try to learn English, they will not be able to learn English at all. This process of deculturation, however, can lead to stress.

Stress occurs when people face difficulties in adapting themselves to the new culture. Kim (2004) illustrates this stress situation with push and pull forces—the push of the new culture and the pull of the old. In other words, immigrants seem to have difficulties in adapting or acculturating the new culture and in unlearning or deculturating the old culture—they desire to retain old customs and old identity, but at the same time they realize the need to change behavior to survive in the new culture. Worthy (2006) revealed that many parents are stressed about their lack of English proficiency. These parents explained situations when they did not understand what their children were saying and what their children's teachers were saying. One parent said:

I didn't understand the teacher. I would go to the conferences that they have there. I would ask her how my daughter was doing, and she would tell me she was doing well. And suddenly, she was bringing home her grades and they weren't very high... She always brought her homework, so I didn't understand why (p. 145).

Hubenthal (2004) revealed that older non-English speaker immigrants have much greater stress when it comes to communicating in English due to factors including: a) cognitive aging, b) motivation and affect, c) health, d) ESL courses, e) prior education, and f) social context. First, “cognitive aging:” many adult immigrants believe that they are not able to learn a new language because they have passed the period in childhood during which first and second languages can most easily be learned. Researches have confirmed that many abilities, including speed of information processing, attention, and aspects of memory do decrease across the lifespan; however, research has also shown that adults are capable of learning, although they may take a longer time to learn and need

more repetition than younger individuals. If adult immigrants could abandon their belief that they are unable to learn English, they would be able to speak English eventually.

Second, “motivation and affect:” desire to learn English and confidence in one’s abilities are associated with better performance, but since these adult immigrants do not have confidence in themselves, they cannot build their own self-motivation to learn English.

Third, “health:” although many older adults are in good health, older immigrants who do have physical or mental health problems may face difficulties in learning English, especially in hearing. Some of the older immigrants with functional problems or chronic diseases might lack the energy needed for learning, and medications can interfere with attention. Fourth, “ESL courses:” many adult immigrants have difficulty finding courses with openings due to the long waiting lists in literacy institutes (because of lacks of tutors and funding from the government). Other issues regarding ESL courses are lack of knowledge about available classes, insufficient time, cost, transportation problems, and nighttime scheduling of courses (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998). Fifth, “prior education:” proficiency in English tends to improve for immigrants who have more years of schooling in their home countries. However, many adult immigrants are not highly educated, and those who are highly educated may have unproductive assumptions about methods of instruction and may not want to engage in activities that are unfamiliar. For example, many immigrants are familiar with the way classes are structured in their home countries where they focused more on memorization, passive learning style, and formal relationships between teachers and students. When they take an ESL course with an informal and collaborative style, they may not feel comfortable. Finally, “social

context.” many immigrants had professional occupations prior to coming to the U.S. and consider occupational status as a source of self-esteem. However, having limited ability to communicate in English leads to unskilled jobs or even unemployment. This unemployment also limits learning English because they do not spend their days surrounded by English-speaking co-workers. These factors create stress for adult immigrants. Many continue to struggle with this stress, while others come to realized the importance of adaptation, successfully pass this stressful stage, and move to the adaptation stage.

Kalavar and Willigen’s (2005) research also supports this position. As newcomers who have spent decades of their life in a different society, they must cognitively, attitudinally, and behaviorally adapt to the new cultural system. Everyday life events in a new environment may become stressful and have effects on the well-being of individuals. The more different the two cultures, the more likely that the adaptation process will be challenging.

According to Kim (2004), the feeling of being a misfit and the increasing of awareness of the state of stress serve as forces that drive individuals to overcome the difficulties and participate in adaptation. As one of the parents in Worthy’s study (2006) said:

Yes for me English is very important because in the conditions that I encounter where I don’t know English, I really feel inadequate. It’s just like missing an arm, like swimming with only one hand. English is very important. One hundred percent. (p. 140)



The voice of this parent reveals that he is definitely aware of the importance of English language and what the consequences of not knowing English are. This awareness is the first step that leads to adaptation.

What comes after the adaptation is “growth” (Kim, 2004). The stage of stress passes as newcomers try new ways to handle problems. As one participant in Hubenthal’s study (2004) said:

I watch TV for children. Short sentence. Good pronunciation. And I take pen and paper and write down sentences. My TV have talking and text...In evening, I watch TV and try to understand. If I don’t know, I write down sentence and word.

After, I take dictionary and correct my sentence. (p. 114)

Stress, adaptation, and growth highlight the core of the changes individuals experience over time. These forces constitute the “three-pronged stress-adaptation-growth dynamic of psychological movement” (Kim, 2004, p. 384) that helps increase an individual’s chances of success in meeting the requirements of the host environment. The stress-adaptation-growth process takes place as long as there are new environmental challenges. The process seems to be intense during the beginning of resettling; however, over a prolonged period of undergoing internal change, the fluctuations of stress and adaptation are likely to become less intense or severe.

### ***1.3.2 Component Model of Ethnic and Cultural Identities***

According to Phinney (1992), affective, cognitive, and behavioral are three components to Asian Americans’ ethnic identity. The affective component is the sense of “belonging, commitment, and positive attitudes toward their ethnic groups.” (p. 106).

The cognitive component is knowledge about one's ethnic group. Lastly, the behavioral component is the degree to which one engages in activities associated with one's ethnic groups. Phinney explains that the more positive attitudes toward their ethnic groups, the more knowledge they have about their ethnic groups, and the more ethnic behaviors they engage, the stronger their ethnic identities. This model of ethnic and cultural identities can be useful in explaining the situation Thai mothers experience in determining their ethnic identities in the USA.

Kim's (2004) theory and the component model can be useful in explaining the situation Thai mothers face in adapting themselves to the new society, and in explaining the situation Thai mothers experience in determining their ethnic identities. However, they do not explain what kind of attitudes and expectations these Thai mothers have toward their children's Thai language usage. In order to understand what Thai mothers' expectations and attitudes towards Thai language, the following question was posed:

RQ: What is the lived experience of cross-culture marriage immigrant mothers regarding their children's language usage?

## **Chapter 2**

### **Research Methodologies**

The purpose of this study was to understand Thai mothers' expectations regarding their children's heritage language usage. I searched for this understanding by evoking the lived experiences of my co-researchers. My objective was to elicit and to understand my co-researchers' lived experiences, and in describing those experiences to identify themes that represented them.

#### ***2.1 Research Contexture***

In order to understand the reasons behind my choice of methods, it is important that I first explain the perspective on scientific inquiry that I will adopt in this research: the theoretical framework that informs the theoretical perspective, the theoretical perspective that informs the methodology, and the methodology that informs the methods. Constructionism is my epistemological stance, interpretivism is my theoretical perspective, narrative inquiry is my methodology, conversational interviewing is my method of data collection, and thematic analysis is my analytic approach.

##### ***2.1.1 Theoretical Framework***

According to Crotty, epistemology is a "way of understand and explaining how we know what we know" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). There are many types of epistemology; however, objectivism and constructionism are the major types often invoked. Objectivist epistemology believes that a meaning or a truth exists out there in the world waiting to be discovered by a researcher (p.8). On the other hand, the epistemology employed in this study, Constructionism, rejects the objectivist epistemology view of human knowledge.

Constructionists, including myself, believe that there is no objective truth waiting to be discovered. Truth, or meaning, comes to exist through interaction with the world.

Meaning is not uncovered, but constructed, and it is clear that people construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. Therefore, from the standpoint of constructionism, it is researchers' job to "make sense the meanings others have about the world" (Creswell, 2007, p. 21). Researchers who adopt a constructionist epistemology do not focus on the discovery of eternal knowledge, but explore and interpret meanings created through human interaction.

### ***2.1.2 Theoretical Perspective***

A theoretical perspective is "the philosophical stance informing the methodology and therefore providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria." (Crotty, 1998, p. 7). It is the philosophical stance that one takes when interpreting the world. The theoretical perspective informing the methodology for this research is Interpretivism. Interpretivists believe that people co-construct and maintain meaning through their everyday interactions. According to Creswell (2007), research which adopts a social construction perspective views individuals as seeking to understand the world in which they live and work. Each person develops "subjective meaning of their experiences" (p. 20). These meanings toward objects and events are complex and varied, and they are developed through interaction with others regarding one's experiences. Therefore, the world that each person experiences is completely unique because it is created in the particular interactions, conversations, and experiences that each person has

had in their life. Each person's world is constantly being influenced by new co-constructed meanings.

### ***2.1.3 Research Methodology***

According to Crotty (1998), a research methodology is the strategy, plan of action, process, or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods, and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcome. Narrative research is my research methodology. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) state, "Stories are a powerful means of making sense of our social reality and our own lives" (p. 55). Because meanings toward objects and events are complex and varied, and because they are developed through interaction with others, researchers who acknowledge this complexity of views must talk directly with people, rather than narrowing the meanings they examine, as for example using surveys. In order to gain information about a Thai mother's lived experiences of her expectations and attitudes regarding her child's Thai language usage, it was therefore important that I get as close as possible to each participant to gather her experiences and thereby get the "whole story" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 7).

### ***2.1.4 Method: Conversational Interviewing***

The goal of my research was to gather as much information as possible about my co-participants stories. Conversational interviewing (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) was the most suitable method because it allowed me to get as close to my co-researchers experiences regarding their children's heritage language learning. An interview is a conversation that has a structure and a purpose. Knowledge is produced socially in the interaction of interviewer and interviewee. An interviewer uses open-ended questions to

gain access to the interviewee's experience. Some of the questions in this study included; "What language do you speak with your child?" "How important is it for you to have your child know Thai?" or "What are the greatest challenges you face as an immigrant parent when talking with your U.S. born child?" These types of questions allowed me explore the lived experiences of my co-researchers and to gain insights into "stories that they have to tell" (Creswell, 2007, p. 155). Together with my questions, smiles, nods, and even silences, I as an interviewer was a "co-producer" of their narratives of their experiences (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 155).

### ***2.1.5 Method: Thematic Analysis***

I analyzed the conversational interview data by using thematic analysis, which involves seeking words and phrases that are relevant to the topic of this study, then grouping them together to create emergent themes. In order to find common themes emerging from the co-researchers' interviews, I had to immerse myself in that collected data. I had to constantly read through the transcriptions, interpreting, reinterpreting, and analyzing the data throughout the process. In the process of interpreting, I tried to "bracket" my own experience as a second-generation child myself, as well as my own experiences with being bilingual. In the next chapter, I present descriptions of the details of the conversational interviews, expressing my co-researchers' experiences in story form. In Chapter 4, I will present the emergent themes which represent the collective experience of my co-researchers.

## ***2.2 Participants***

Unlike social science research, human science researches do not seek to generalize or predict to a larger population. Instead, the goal of human science is to understand the lived experiences of individuals in a particular group. As a result, there was no need to have a large number of participants. All of my co-researchers were recruited in the Thai community in Fairbanks, Alaska. I had known all of the participants prior to the interviews, having met most of them at the Thai Festival at Pioneer Park a few years ago. All participants were Thai mothers, with various levels of education and work status, who had an American spouse and had a U.S. born child or children. One condition for these Thai mothers was that they must be the first generation that migrated to the United States. I was able to contact 6 individuals who agreed to participate in the study.

## ***2.3 Procedure***

A Thai e-mail and a Facebook message describing the details of the study, as well as the purpose, procedures, and potential risks of the study were provided to all participants. Individuals who read the e-mail or the message on Facebook were asked to contact me via e-mail, phone, or Facebook message. During the initial contact with the volunteers, I introduced the topic of my research and described the procedure. I informed the volunteers that the method of gathering data was to be conversational interviews that would most likely take between forty and sixty minutes. After the volunteers agreed to participate in the study, I then set up a time and place to meet with each participant individually.

Interviews took place in a location preferred by co-researcher. Most of the interviews took place in a coffee shop, and some took place in my co-researchers' offices. I followed all prescribed IRB regulations regarding human science research. Thai informed consent forms were given (Appendix A) that detailed the purpose, procedures, and potential risks of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the confidentiality of their interview data, and were signed by each participant. I reminded the participants that they were allowed to exit the study, before its completion, if they chose so.

In the interviews, I asked my co-researchers open-ended questions about their experiences regarding their children's heritage language usage. Interviews were captured using a voice recorder, which were uploaded on to my personal laptop and transcribed shortly after I conducted them. During the interviews, I noted non-verbal gestures and facial expression of my co-researchers, and I then described those gestures and facial expressions in chapter 3. Upon completion of the interviews, all audio recordings were transcribed for later analysis, and the original audio recordings were destroyed. Any reference to co-researchers' identity was replaced with an English name for future reference.

#### ***2.4 Researcher as Research Tool***

When a human science researcher interprets and analyzes his/her co-researcher's experience, he/she must have some experience to make sense out of it or to create meanings. The researcher's own life experiences inform his/her world view and unavoidably influence the research. It is clear then that the researcher's own perspectives



need to be recognized because they influence data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggest that researchers must be able to recognize how their specific personal experiences might be present while conducting each interview, and must reflexively take influences of these experiences into account in analysis. Researcher reflexivity in analysis assures that the lived experiences described and the themes that emerge represent the co-researchers' lived experience not that of the researcher. As the result, I must ensure to be reflexive throughout the research process, and communicate that reflexivity to my readers; which includes providing a description of how personal interest, personality, value orientation, and bias all influence the research that has been conducted.

As indicated in section 1.1, because I am a second-generation child, I may have favored some interpretations of my co-researchers' experiences that appeared to be closely aligned with the construction that I have created prior to the interview. This will impact the ways in which I have interpreted the narratives of my co-researchers. Being a second-generation child myself, I expected that some of these women would say something about Thai language being useless, and that is why they did not teach their children to speak Thai, because that is what my parents told me about Chinese language. However, none of my co-researchers thought that Thai language was useless even though not many people in the United States know Thai. Being a bilingual person, I may have shared certain struggling experiences with my co-researchers. As an individual who moved to a new and unfamiliar environment, Alaska, I may have shared certain experiences with my co-researchers too. These aspects of my experiences may have

impacted how my co-researchers and I interacted; therefore the nature of the narratives we co-constructed may have been affected.

## Chapter 3

### Narrative Perspectives

The best way to better understand the lived experiences of Thai mothers regarding their children's heritage language use is to ask them. Conversational interviewing allows me to gain detailed insights of my co-researchers' thoughts and beliefs. There were six Thai mothers who participated in this study. Each interview was conducted in Thai. This chapter contains descriptions of the interviews that I conducted with my co-researchers, below are their stories.

#### *3.1 Amy's Conversational Interview*

My first co-researcher, Amy, was a friend who I have known for about three years. I chose to interview her first because I wanted to have my first interview with someone familiar. Amy is in her early thirties and a mother of a five-year-old girl. She arrived at the coffee shop at eight o'clock in the morning looking energetic, and said that she was excited about the interview. Before we started the process, we got ourselves some coffee and cookies, and I explained my research and handed her the informed consent form, which we went over it together. I asked if she had any questions before we started, but she did not have any questions. Therefore I asked her to sign the informed consent form and I proceeded to start the interview. We talked for about 45 minutes.

I began the interview by asking, "What language do you speak with your child?" Amy answered right away that she uses both Thai and English. She explained further as she smiled that she mainly uses Thai with her daughter, but sometimes English just pops up unintentionally during conversations, especially when there are other people present

besides her and her daughter. Amy explained “sometimes, the environment forces me to speak English—talking with my husband for instance, and then if I’m in the middle of the conversation with my husband and suddenly my daughter says something or asks something, I would answer automatically in English—I forget to speak Thai with her for a moment. But mainly, I try to speak Thai with my daughter.”

I asked Amy if she started speaking Thai to her daughter when her daughter was born. “Yes, yes, I started speaking Thai to her even since I was pregnant,” she answered. Amy paused a little bit and then continued:

Because it’s easier for her to learn to speak both languages when she was young. My daughter’s been taught Thai since she was born, and so she speaks naturally. It’s very important to start when children are still young. Those children who didn’t learn to speak Thai when they were young with their moms, they definitely have a harder time learning Thai later on because it is a very difficult language. It has many different tones, and different tones create different meanings. It’s very difficult. But if they were taught Thai language while they were still young, they would be more natural and more fluent.

I wanted to know if her daughter was always willing to speak Thai to her. Amy shook her head from side to side and gave a little smile, “No, my daughter tries not to speak Thai, she prefers speaking English than Thai, especially when I don’t force her to speak Thai.” Amy went on to talk about how she forces her daughter to speak Thai to her. She has to pretend that she does not understand English, does not understand what her

daughter is saying to her, or she has to pretend to be angry with her daughter unless her daughter speaks Thai to her. Amy indicated that this problem began:

When my daughter was three years old, and she started to realize that I could speak English because she heard me speak English with her dad and other people. Then she started to speak English with me too! If I wasn't being forceful, she wouldn't speak Thai to me. I have to pretend that I am mad unless she speaks Thai to me and she would be like 'But mom...I know you understand English!'

We both shared a laugh together. She emphasized that mothers have to be strict and forceful otherwise their children will not be able to speak Thai. At the same time, mothers should be willing to teach and make the lessons fun for their children to make them want to learn Thai too.

I buy a lot of Thai books, Thai fairy tales, Thai cartoons, and things like that. I read for her every night in Thai. She loves it, she loves to listen and she understands most of it. After reading a bed time story, I always ask her if she understands the story and I always ask her questions about what happened in the story, like, 'What did the monkey do? Why did the monkey do that?' If she can't answer, then I read it for her again and point at the pictures in the book until she gets it. I also read Walt Disney's stories but in Thai language, such as Cinderella.

At this point, I was curious about her daughter's ability to understand Thai. I asked Amy, "How much does she understand? Does she understand Thai more than English or English more than Thai?" Amy informed me that her daughter understands

Thai most of the time because she and her daughter spent time together twenty-four hours per day and seven days a week before her daughter started to go to kindergarten.

I spoke solely Thai to her when she was born up until she started to go to school.

In fact, her first word was even a Thai word. My husband went to work and my stepdaughter went to school, there were always just my little daughter and me at home, so I had a lot of time to teach her Thai language.

I asked if Amy thought that her daughter considered Thai as her first language when she was little. Amy said, “Yes, I think so.” She smiled and continued, “My daughter understands Thai almost one hundred percent, unless there are some new vocabularies that she has never heard before.” She gave an example of the word ‘dog’ in Thai. We have two words that basically have the same meaning, but one is a formal word, used in papers, news, and newspapers. Her daughter was not familiar with the formal word, so she did not understand what it was. I asked if there are some difficulties when explaining things to her daughter. Amy said that she does not have any difficulties because she is quite fluent in English. In fact, her undergraduate degree was English. Her answer led me to another question about challenges when she first moved to the USA.

I asked her if there were any difficulties or any challenges in adapting to the new environment when she first moved to the United States. Amy paused for a little bit and said that there were not really any difficulties because she was already able to speak English when she first moved here. She fell in love with Alaska right away and didn’t have any difficulties living in Alaska.

I went on to ask about what her husband thought about teaching Thai to their daughter. Amy gave a big smile and said, “My husband is very supportive. He wants our daughter to be able to speak Thai. He also thinks that it is important for our daughter to be bilingual.” I then asked Amy about why is it that she and her husband think that Thai is so important to her daughter. Amy stopped for a few seconds, and then began:

It’s important because, because, English is an international language, it’s used globally. No matter where you go, people mainly are able to speak English and I see that it’s very important. However, even though. Thai language is not as widely used, it is our language. My daughter also has Thai blood. She has a chance to choose in the future where she wants to live; whether in Thailand or in the states. Even when she visits Thailand, just to travel in Thailand, if she can speak Thai and understand Thai, she won’t be deceived or tricked. She won’t feel like an outsider even though she’s a mixed, she will feel like she’s Thai because she will be able to communicate with the people while she’s in Thailand. Further more, she can speak with her grandparents, and other relatives in Thailand who don’t speak English. It’s much better for her when she understands what people around her are talking about, not just sit there and get bored because she doesn’t understand. She can really participate in the conversations and feel like she’s a part of the family.

Then I thought of her stepdaughter because I knew that her stepdaughter has also gone to Thailand to visit her family. I asked, “What about your stepdaughter? Does she

speak Thai too?” “No, she doesn’t,” Amy responded, and then described her stepdaughter’s situation:

She was already eight years old when I moved into the house, so- she was already a big girl. I also teach her, but she doesn’t feel comfortable speaking it because Thai language is, it is, difficult and the sounds and the tones make it difficult for her to speak. But she does understand some Thai though. She can guess what we are talking about especially, when I scold her little sister. I use repeated words, right? Like ‘Go brush your teeth! Go brush your teeth now!’ in Thai. My stepdaughter would tell her little sister in English ‘Hey, you’d better go brush your teeth now!’

Amy and I laughed about her big sister little sister story. I thought it was a cute story. I then asked Amy my final question, “What do think about some parents who don’t teach their kids Thai?” Amy’s facial expression changed. She did not have a smile on her face anymore. She said that those parents probably are afraid that their children would get confused with both languages at the same time. She does not think that is true at all; she thinks that children’s brains can easily adapt to both languages and differentiate between two different languages like a switch on and switch off button. I asked Amy what she meant by switch on and switch off button. She said that children could switch their brains onto a Thai version mode when they want to speak Thai and then when they are about to speak English, they switch it off and turn on their English mode.

I at this point was satisfied with the interview and did not have any more questions to ask Amy. I asked her if she had anything else to add. Amy said that she



wants me to teach Thai to my child when I have one of my own. I then thanked her for the interview and switched off the voice recorder. We ended up talking for another hour at the coffee shop before she had to go to work and I had to go to school.

### ***3.2 Amanda's Conversational Interview***

My second co-researcher has a very tight schedule. She owns a store and she is the only one running the store; therefore, she could not meet any other place besides her own store. So we agreed to have the interview at her store one afternoon. She chose the most convenient time for her—time that she thought there were not going to be that many customers. While we were in the process of the interview, we got interrupted once by a customer, which was fine. I first explained what my research was about and handed her the informed consent form. I gave her time to read through the form, and asked if she had any questions before we started the process. Amanda shook her head, said that she did not have any questions, and that she understood everything that was on the consent form. Our interview lasted about 40 minutes.

Amanda is a 37-year-old mother with two children, one is 16-year-old boy, who was born in Thailand and moved to Alaska when he was three years old, and another who is 10-year-old girl. I met Amanda and her children for the first time at the Thai Festival at Pioneer Park last summer. I know for a fact that her children do not speak any Thai and do not understand any Thai. Therefore, I did not ask what language she speaks with her children because I knew what the answer was going to be. I began by asking Amanda, “Do you think it’s important for your children to learn Thai?” Amanda did not answer right away; she took her time and then began:

I think it's, it's important because, umm, my kids also want to learn Thai, but me, I don't have time to speak Thai with my kids. Umm, because I use English all day and my kids go to school, they also use English all the time, and when I get home, I speak English with my husband. Because learning Thai takes a very long time for them to be able to communicate in Thai and I don't have enough patience to teach them, that's why it's been English since forever.

I acknowledged what she had said with a nod and added, "not enough time, too?" "Yes, yes," said Amanda. She explained further that when everybody gets home from work and school, it is already dinnertime. After dinner, her children usually have their homework to do, so there is not much time for her to teach Thai to her children. And after homework, it is too late; they have to go to bed. I inquired whether Amanda had ever spoken Thai to her children when they were little, when they were born. Reflecting on my question, Amanda began:

After I gave birth to my second child, I stayed home for about a month and then I started to work again. I brought my daughter to work everyday and I always speak English to her because I also have to speak English with customers.

Because Amanda mentioned that her children now want to learn Thai. I asked her to talk more about that. Amanda indicated that her daughter wants to learn Thai. She used to read Thai stories to her daughter, but after her daughter started school and started to have other things to do such as homework, they do not have enough time to read together anymore. "What about your son?" I was curious because I knew that he moved to the United States when he was already three years old. He must have been able to speak Thai

when he was in Thailand. Amanda looked at a picture frame which contained her family picture on her desk and answered:

My son was able to speak Thai fluently when he was three, but, at first when he first moved here, I was afraid, umm, you know, I was afraid that he wouldn't be able to fit in. Umm, I was afraid that when he was in a day care, he wouldn't understand the teacher or wouldn't be able to tell teacher what he wanted like going to the toilet, For that reason, I decided to teach him English.

I nodded and asked if her son had any difficulties adapting himself to the day care. She looked down and nodded slightly as she answered:

At first it was difficult for him, he would be crying in the corner alone. That was, umm, that was the first day at the day care. His teacher called me at my store, asked me to speak with him. I asked him what the matter was. He said that he needed to go pee, he tried to tell the teacher but the teacher didn't understand what he wanted.

I, at the moment, was emotionally involved. I could picture her son crying in the corner, not being able to communicate with other kids at the day care, no one to talk to, no one to play with. I asked Amanda if it took a long time for him to learn to speak English. Amanda smiled and said that it only took him six months before he became fluent in English. Then she went on to explain her son's situation:

After he started to go to a kindergarten, he started to use more and more English, less Thai. At home, I didn't really keep speaking Thai to him because I was afraid that he wouldn't be able to understand lessons in school, because everything is

taught in English, right? On top of that, I also had to study English myself. I was studying and practicing English, umm, and then when he was in the first grade, Thai language was vanished. There weren't that many Thai people around here either at the time. I was the only one, that's why Thai language's gone.

When Amanda mentioned that she, herself, had to also study English when she first moved here, I was wondered if she had had any difficulties explaining things to her son when he stopped using Thai altogether. Reflecting on my question, Amanda said that it was quite frustrating for her because sometimes she could not explain in English. She could not find the right words. She used basic words, but sometimes things were more complicated than that, and that is when she asked her husband to explain it to her son. "Oh, so your husband understood you?" "Yes, he did. I always asked him to explain to my son about things," Amanda answered. I paused to think about what to ask her next, and Amanda began to speak:

I actually regret, because, because when we all visit Thailand, visit my parents in Thailand, my parents and my ex-husband's parents really want to talk with their grandkids, but they can't communicate. They don't understand each other. I always have to be a translator for them.

I thought about her son, he was fluent in Thai when he moved to Alaska. Now he does not speak Thai at all. I asked Amanda, "What does he think about that? Does he still wish he could speak Thai?" Amanda said that her son told her that he wanted to study languages, especially Spanish and German and that he did not mention that he wants to learn Thai. I asked Amanda if it is because he thinks that Thai language is not popular,

not that widely used, and not that important? Amanda slightly nodded and said that it is possible that he thinks so because he does not have any Thai friends, he has many Mexican friends, and he has some friends who live in Germany. “What about you? What language do you want him to learn?” I asked. Amanda answered right away that she wants her son to choose by himself, but that deep inside she wants him to be able to communicate with his grandparents in Thailand. I probed Amanda’s response: “So you never force them to learn Thai at all?” “No, no I don’t. I let them decide whether they want to learn, it’s their life, and I don’t want to force them.”

Somehow I felt that her son might still remember some Thai since he was fluent when he was young. I asked if maybe he could still recognize some words or even speak it, but he does not know he can do so. Amanda smiled and nodded in agreement:

I know he recognizes some Thai words. He told me that when I and other Thai friends speak slowly, he would understand. But if we speak very fast, which we usually do, he doesn’t understand. It’s way too fast for him. Every night, he tells me that he loves me in Thai. He’s been saying that since he started to speak.

Umm, I think it’d be good, if he, umm, if he could speak Thai, but he chose not to learn. Then it’s, it’s his decision.

Referring back to when she said that she had some difficulties communicating in English when she first moved to the United States, I asked her if that was the other reason why she chose to speak English with her children all the time—so she could practice and learn English with her children. Amanda looked up at the ceiling for a second, then nodded, “That’s probably right. I needed to learn English; I wasn’t good at English at all.

I used a dictionary most of the time, I didn't learn English in Thailand, and I didn't go to a college." "Were there any other difficulties or challenges when you first moved here?" I added. "Umm, I don't think so. Well, I really missed Thailand, Thai food, that's all. Umm, I didn't have a lot of friends back then. There weren't that many Thai people around. But I don't think I had any other difficulties other than English; my husband has always been supportive. He helps me with everything. Maybe that's why I never had to deal with any difficulties." She answered with a smile on her face.

Quickly, before I forgot the question, I asked, "What does your husband think about Thai language?" Amanda revealed that her husband really wants to speak Thai and also wants his children to be able to speak Thai. But he understands that it's a very difficult language and it takes a long time to learn. He never forces her to teach Thai to their children as he also thinks that it's their lives, they can choose whether they want to learn or not.

I did not have any other questions to add. I asked if she had anything else to add, she shook her head and said, "No, I don't think so," Hence, I ended the interview. A few days later, I got a call from her saying that she wants me to teach Thai to both of her children and her husband in the summer. She said that it was my interview that made her think about the Thai language more than ever. And she asked her children, after the interview day, if they wanted to learn Thai. They said they would love to learn Thai, and so she called me. I agreed that I would teach them Thai in the summer.

### ***3.3 Linda's Conversational Interview***

I have known Linda for about five years; I first met her the first time when I came to Alaska with the Work and Travel program in 2005. However, even though I have known who she is, all I knew about her life and her family is that she had a daughter who is fourteen years old, who speaks Thai very well. She is in her late thirties. Linda and I had agreed to meet at the coffee shop at 10 am. We arrived at around the same time; I saw her at the parking lot, I greeted her and we shared a small talk while we walked inside the building. I got a cup of white mocha, but Linda did not want anything to eat; she told me that she already had breakfast with her daughter at home.

It had been a while since I had seen her, so we talked about how everything was going in our lives for a while. After our small talk had come to a natural end, I explained what my research was about. Actually I had explained that to her on a facebook message, when I sent her one to ask if she was interested in being interviewed for my research. However, I just wanted to explain some more about it. I handed her an informed consent form, let her read the form peacefully, and then asked if she had any questions regarding the research. Linda did not have any questions and said that everything was clearly stated in the consent form. I then began the interview by asking, "What language do you speak with your daughter?" Linda quickly responded, "Since she was born, I only speak Thai to her because I was not a good English speaker." I added "Only Thai?" "Yes, only Thai," she replied. Then she added, "My daughter is a quiet girl, and I am also a quiet person. We don't talk too much, but when we talk, we talk in Thai." I acknowledged her response with a nod.

I was amazed about the fact that Linda and her daughter solely communicate in Thai, and hoped I would be able to do so with my future child. I asked Linda why is it that she only speaks Thai to her daughter. Did she think it was very important for her daughter to learn Thai? Linda began:

Ever since she was born, my husband always emphasizes that I must speak Thai to our daughter. My husband is a mixed; Native Alaskan and American. His mom didn't teach him the native language and he feels very sad, and he, he regrets that he can't speak his own language. He then wanted to make sure that I teach Thai to our child, so the story wouldn't repeat itself. He wanted so much that his daughter must be able to speak Thai and he is the most supportive person. At first, I didn't see any importance because we live in America. I- was at first not very active- didn't care if she would speak Thai or not, something like that.

I acknowledged her response and asked if her daughter is now very fluent in Thai. Linda confirmed that she is: "She might be a little slow when communicating in Thai but she sure understands everything. When people ask her questions: like, when her cousins in Thailand ask her questions, she can definitely answer every question in Thai but- maybe a little bit slow. She understands Thai almost one hundred percent, especially swear words. Linda and I laughed about her story. "Does she get those words from Thai TV shows?" I continued. Linda responded:

Yes, yes, that's one of the ways she learned her Thai. Well, because I stayed home with my daughter, just the two of us. No one else to talk with, so I turned on



some Thai TV shows for her to watch and she loved it. She watches shows everyday.

“So you home schooled your daughter?”- “No, I don’t home school my daughter but she did stay with me the whole time ever since she was born until five years old when she started to go to school,” she answered. I asked if Linda was working anywhere while her daughter was still young, she indicated no. She was and still is a housewife therefore; I asked her if of being a housewife had given her more time than other people to teach her daughter Thai. She nodded slightly and agreed with me that it was one of the reasons, but that the main reason why her daughter is able to communicate in Thai is actually her husband and herself: “It really depends on the parents—how hard they try, because it’s undoubtedly very very difficult.”

I asked her to tell me about how she started teaching her daughter. She thought for a second, then began:

If I’m not mistaken, if I still remember, I umm, I only spoke Thai to my daughter since she was born. For example, I would tell her to bring a glass of water for me, or I would tell her to bring something from the diner table for me. At first she didn’t understand what “Toh” (a table in Thai) was, I would explain to her that “Toh” is a big square thing in the kitchen where we eat everyday, something like that, then she would know what I was talking about.

I decided to dig deeper: “So you said it also depends on the father?” She looked at me with her big eyes and nodded repeatedly:

Yes, absolutely depends on the husband, because I would, I would give up. I would not want to keep going no more because it is too exhausting, because sometimes, she didn't want to speak back to me, she ignored me sometimes. When she was around four years old, she was being resistant. She wouldn't answer in Thai, she would answer in English. I told her that I didn't understand, I told her that she must speak Thai to me. But- she kept resisting. Luckily, my husband always encouraged me, he always, always told me that, 'If you don't teach her now, you will regret about this for the rest of your life. You must teach her and be patient.' So I'm like, okay! I'll keep going!

I sat there for a moment, amazed how her husband was so supportive about the topic. "Wow," I said. "Your husband is super supportive!" "Very," she responded:

Without him, I would have given up a long time ago. Without him, my daughter wouldn't be able to speak Thai. It's very difficult, Jane. Very, very difficult to teach someone to speak Thai and I don't normally have much patience to do so. Without him, I wouldn't be able to.

Linda added that it was also because she is a quiet person, not a very socialized person. She did not hang out with other Thai people in town, so it was hard for her since she was the only one teaching her daughter.

I was still amazed. I have talked to her daughter a few times when we saw each other at events like Thai Festivals. I have heard her speak Thai and it was absolutely perfect! She talks like a Thai person does, if I closed my eyes, I would not be able to tell

that she is a mixed child. I was amazed how she could do it. I asked Linda if her daughter could also read and write. She revealed that:

No, she can't read. Right now, she can write her own name. I teach how to write first because reading is even more difficult. I showed Thai cartoons to her when she was younger and I keep speaking Thai to her every single day.

I then remembered that she said in the beginning that she was not good at English at all when she first came. I asked her if it was a challenge for her to learn English and if there were any other difficulties in adapting into the new environment. She said that it was very difficult for her at first because she did not learn English much back in Thailand: "I tried and tried, I didn't care if I was saying it correctly or not, and I just tried to speak it." After a few seconds of silence as I was waiting for her to say something else, Linda's facial expression changed, she looked down at my cookie on the table and then looked up to me:

And yes, there were some other difficulties. I have been here for 16 years. At first, it was very difficult, Jane. I wanted to go home to Thailand- it was- it was dark, depressing, and I knew no one except for my husband. I cried my eyes out, felt like I was in hell. I thought to myself that what on earth am I doing here? It was all too dark and I wanted to go home.

At that moment, I felt that I was very depressed, too, and wanted to give her a big hug, but she continued:

I was very frustrated for the first few years, I knew then that I had to do something, otherwise I would continue be depressed. So I went out, made new

friends, subscribed a Thai magazine, and- and listened to Thai music. Then I started to feel better. I started to like Alaska and wanted to live here. I started to feel like Alaska was my home.

I felt relieved with her, because I was so emotionally attached to her story. I asked if she has many friends now. She said that she has some very good friends. I was happy for her at that moment.

I asked if she became more fluent in English after she had lived here a few years. She said that her English was better but still not great. Even now, she does not think that she can speak English well. I told her that I had seen her posts on Facebook, and her English seems to be very good. She laughed and told me that “Okay, I will tell you behind the scenes part. After I write something on Facebook, before I post them, I always ask my daughter or my husband to come and check my sentences. I ask them to correct any mistakes because I feel like going public needs to be accurate. So I ask them to check every time.” I laughed about her family teamwork story.

Because Linda was talking about her level of English proficiency, I wondered whether she ever had any troubles when talking to her daughter: “Was your daughter very good at Thai when she was around five or six years old?” “Hmm, no, not yet,” she replied. “Then did you have any troubles when explaining about something to your daughter at all, like, when you couldn’t explain in Thai because your daughter wasn’t good at Thai yet, but you couldn’t explain in English either because you weren’t good at English?” Linda thought for a moment and nodded repeatedly: “Yes, there were times like that as I recall. But then I tried to use simple words to explain. Sometime mix with

English words- English words that I knew- together it helped her understand. But mainly I would explain in basic Thai words to her.”

I suddenly thought about my classmates in elementary school in Thailand who disliked learning English. They thought it was useless since we all speak Thai in Thailand. They would ask the English teacher why must they learn English in school. That made me think about Linda’s daughter, so I asked if she has been cooperative. Linda said:

Sometimes she didn’t want to learn; she resisted. She would not speak Thai back at me, she would answer my questions in English. Umm, she used to think that Thai language is not useful; therefore, she asked why she had to learn Thai. I didn’t know that’s how she felt until she told me recently. She is now proud of herself that she can communicate in Thai. My family went to Thailand last year, and she was admired all around from our relatives. They were all giving her good compliments about how amazing she was that she could speak Thai. She could take her father out and be her father’s translator. I think she’s very proud of herself now. I think she’s proud to be Thai now.

I asked Linda to say more about being proud to be Thai. She indicated that her daughter is now proud to be different from her friends, proud to be able to speak two languages, and proud to have different meal to bring to school every day. Linda and I shared a laugh together at this point. “What kind of food does she bring to school?” I wanted to know. Linda said that she makes a different dish every morning. Sometimes noodles, sometimes rice, sometimes stir-fried, sometimes soup, and so on. Many of her

friends bring a sandwich and yogurt to school everyday: the same old thing everyday. They would always come to her daughter to see what she's having for lunch today. "And I think she's very proud of that," Linda added.

"That's good, that's good." I said with a smile to Linda. I paused a little bit to think about my next question to ask Linda. I wondered aloud what she thought about those US-Thai children who cannot communicate in Thai. "What do you think happened?" I asked. Linda spoke with a very clear and louder voice, "I think it's because of mom and dad. If the father doesn't support- doesn't support the wife, then the mother will give up or become discouraged because it's very difficult. It takes two people to do it. Not just one person. It has to be both mom and dad." "Do you think it's true that a child will get confused if they are exposed with two languages at the same time?" I continued. She responded:

I don't think so. I don't know. For me, I think knowing two, three, or even four languages is very beneficial to anyone, right? And plus, kids are smart. Have you ever seen Tiger Woods' interview? (I shook my head no.) He said that his mom was afraid that he would get confused if she spoke Thai to him while his dad spoke English to him. But it's not true, in fact. Because kids are smart, they can separate the two languages in their little brains. They are capable of knowing different languages.

I nodded in agreement. And so I asked her again that it all depends on the parents. She reassured me, "Yes, that's the most important factor." "What about environment?" I continued. "That is also part of it, not all, Because you are with your kid 24/7 for the first

few years, right? The environment doesn't really have anything to do with the child, not until the child starts to go to kindergarten. Before they do so, it all depends on parents."

Then I realized again that Linda was a housewife, she had never worked since she gave birth. She must have had more time than other mothers who have work to do, so I continued, "You have been a full time mom; what about those moms who have to work?"

Linda began her answer right away:

Well, that's a part of it. Patience is the key, no matter you work or not. How come they can take English class at Literacy Council for two hours a day, many times a week, but can't spare an hour to teach Thai to their kids? Right? I think work isn't a problem. It doesn't have to be a formal lesson, sitting on a desk or something like that. It can be just, "Oh honey, can you bring that to me?" or "What's that called in Thai?" You know, one word a day or something- keep trying and trying- children are smart, they can remember those words if moms have enough patience to teach.

I nodded heavily many times in a row. "But some kids still don't speak Thai," I said. She replied that it is mainly because of patience. She always tells her Thai friends who have children to keep going, keep teaching Thai to their children because it is much easier when they are still young. When they grow up, it will definitely become more difficult. There will be many other things to distract them from learning Thai when they grow up.

I wanted to talk more about her husband and how he supports her in the process of teaching Thai to their daughter. "Your husband must be very proud of his daughter." I

stated simply. She said, “Ohhhh, very much so! He is very proud, very very proud. They are very close. Sometimes when I scold my husband in Thai, my daughter would translate that into English for her dad!” We both laughed quite loud about the story. I told her that it is very nice of her husband to be such a supportive person and he must think that Thai language is very important. Linda nodded and said:

Yes, this is very important for him and for our daughter. He wants our daughter to be able to communicate in Thai. It’s for her future. We don’t know what her future is going to be. We don’t know where she’s going to choose to live. She might meet someone in Thailand, or might want to help Thai people in some ways. It’s in the future; we have no idea. But we want to hand her many alternative choices. We want her to know both languages now, and it’s up to her in the future if she’s going to stick with it or not. We want to do our part the best as we can.

I nodded and sat there for a moment as I thought for another question to ask. We had talked for about 50 minutes and I realized that I did not know what else to ask. I asked her if she had anything else to add. She said that mothers should make an effort to teach their children Thai because it is our language. I thanked her for the interview and switched off the voice recorder.

### ***3.4 Cassandra’s Conversational Interview***

Again, I came to know Cassandra through Thai events in Fairbanks. Cassandra has two children; one is a nine-year-old girl and the other one is a five-year-old boy. Cassandra has a bachelor’s degree in Business Administration; she graduated from a



well-known international university in Thailand which is an English environmental university, that is, everything is taught in English by native English speakers. Cassandra is fluent in English.

We agreed to meet at the coffee shop in a local bookstore at 11 am. I arrived on time and waited for about ten minutes before she showed up. After a small talk about how we all were doing and what we had been up to recently, I handed her an informed consent form and explained what my research was about. We went through the consent form together. She gave me a compliment before we started the interview that it was such a good idea to do research on this. She said that she was very interested to know the results. I gave her a big smile and asked if she had any questions before we began the interview. She said that she did not have any questions, so I started the interview with a simple question, as usual. “What language do you speak with your children?” Cassandra revealed that she mainly speaks Thai with her children, not all the time, but usually. She said that it was her fault that she did not teach Thai to her children earlier. She wanted her children to speak Thai, but she was also learning English when she first moved here, and there were many things going on around her. She was seven months pregnant when she first moved to the United States. After she gave birth, she was living with her husband’s parents in New Jersey while her husband was in the Army in Alaska. She did not see the importance of speaking Thai to her daughter then.

I nodded to acknowledge her response, as Cassandra continued:

But my son knows a lot of Thai. My daughter didn’t know much about Thai because there was just me in the family from Thailand. I was with my husband’s

parents. So everything was in English. But then when we moved to Alaska. I asked my mom to move to Alaska. She came when I gave birth to my second child. Umm, therefore, my son knows a lot of Thai from my mom. He doesn't speak though, but he understands almost everything. He can sing Thai songs, but he doesn't like speaking Thai. Both of my children are Buddhists because I am Buddhist. They asked why they have to be Buddhists and why they have to pray. I told them that every religion is good, every religion teaches people to be moral, to be good to society. But because I'm Buddhist, I want my kids to be Buddhist like me.

Cassandra talked more about religions, and after she had paused, I redirected the conversation back to our previous topic—Thai language. I asked her if her daughter could speak some Thai now, since her mother is living with them in Alaska at the moment. Cassandra described her daughter as a good and fast learner. She can pick up Thai language quite quickly. She is eager to learn and always asks questions. On the other hand, her son does not like speaking Thai. He does not speak it at all, but he understands. “I don't know why he doesn't speak Thai, maybe because I don't push him enough.” Cassandra stated. “So you don't force your children to learn Thai?” I asked Cassandra. She shook her head slowly in agreement and began:

I didn't like to force my children to learn Thai. I didn't force them to speak, but now I do force them to write Thai characters and count 1-10 in Thai. I asked my mom to take care of my kids while I'm at work. I wish I had more time at home with my kids but I got work to do. I can't just stay home and be a housewife or a

full-time mom like other people. However, my mom doesn't speak English at all, she can only speak Thai and that is a good thing. So if my kids want to eat or do something, they have to learn Thai to speak with my mom while I'm not home.

So this is like, the situations like these force them to learn to speak Thai.

Cassandra and I laughed about the story and then she continued "I didn't teach my daughter to speak Thai when she was born, I started to teach her Thai when she was already three years old." I was curious what changed her mind and asked why she started teaching her daughter Thai when she was three years old? Cassandra told me a story:

When she was three years old, she started to go to school, started to watch cartoons on TV. And I heard she spoke Spanish, she picked up her Spanish from watching TV. So I realized that she's capable of learning other languages. I then showed her Thai cartoons; she started to ask what this word means? What that word means? How to say "mom" in Thai? I saw that she was enthusiastic, so I started to teach her. But my son is another story; he isn't enthusiastic. He doesn't want to learn, but I'm like- okay, that's okay. Boys are different than girls, right? Umm, girls follow their moms. I pray every morning, my daughter does it too, but my son doesn't. But I'm okay, if he doesn't want to do it, he doesn't have to. But you know what? He's praying now in the morning and I didn't even have to say anything.

I liked the idea of not forcing children to do what mothers want them to do, but I also was aware that if we do not force children to learn, there is a chance that they are

never going to learn. So I asked Cassandra what she would do if her children did not try to learn Thai as she expected. Cassandra thought for several seconds answered:

I don't like forcing my children to do things. But I tell them what is good for them. I show them how to pray, if they don't want to pray, it's fine. But I show them as their role model. I tell them that I'm proud to be the way I am, I'm proud to be Thai and you should be proud too. You should be proud that you are unique, not like other children at the school. Now my children are proud to be half Thai, half American, they are proud to wear Thai costume to school even though their classmates sometimes make fun of them at school. They told me that some kids at school called them "a clown" because they wear weird outfits to school. But my kids told me when they got home from school that they told those kids that 'My grandmom bought these outfits for us from Thailand. If you've never been to Thailand, don't call me clown because you don't know what it's like there, people over there wear this kind of outfit, this is normal, not weird. You don't know anything about other places, so don't call me clown.' Everyday, kids at school will come and see what my kids have for lunch today because their meals are always different everyday. And they are pretty proud to be different.

Cassandra gave me a smile. On that note, I was reminded of a comment that Cassandra had made earlier. She said that her son does not speak Thai, but he understands most of it, so I asked, "If he was proud to be half Thai and proud to be different, how come he doesn't try to speak Thai?" Cassandra described her son's situation:

...he feels embarrassed when he can't get the words right. The tones are probably the most challenging thing for him. Thai language is difficult because it has different tones and each tone creates different meanings. So when he says something, people don't understand which word he really means, and people laugh about what he said, not because it was incorrect, but because it was cute. However, he feels like people laughed at him because he was not saying it right and he feels embarrassed.

I agreed with Cassandra that Thai people like to laugh when foreigners try to speak Thai. But honestly, it is merely because they sound adorable and we cannot help smiling and laughing. Cassandra continued that her son sometimes speaks Thai at home, to his grandmother, and that she uses the "role model" technique instead of the "forcing" technique to inspire her children to learn different languages. She keeps telling her children that she can speak five languages—Thai, English, Korean, Chinese, and Japanese. She hopes that her children will see it as a beneficial thing to know many languages like their mother, and will finally take Thai language seriously. I was amazed by her talent, as I can only speak four languages! I thought four languages are already many and sometimes I get them mixed up. I asked her how she became fluent in those four languages other than Thai, and if it is because she can speak five languages herself that makes her expect that her children should be able to speak different languages too? Cassandra smiled as she sat up straight:

I- I want my kids to know different languages because, because languages are useful. They provide many benefits to us no matter where we go. They provide,

umm, direct benefits to speakers. We will be able to understand other cultures and situations better than people who don't speak the language. My husband loves to learn languages too. He can speak a little bit of Thai. He was in Iraq and Afghanistan, there he learnt how to speak, read, and write their languages.

"Wow," I said, "so obviously your husband supports the idea of your children learning Thai?" "Absolutely," was her response. On that note, I wanted to know more about things that she does to support her children in order to learn Thai. I asked Cassandra if there were any more techniques besides using cartoons and having grandmother talks to them in Thai. I recalled that she said something about having her children write Thai characters, so I asked her to say more about that. Cassandra elaborated on what she had said earlier in the interview:

I have them write Thai characters everyday. Everyday they have two separate homework assignments—one from school, and the other one from their mom. But I don't give them any homework on weekends because I think weekends are time to relax. Saturdays are their day, they can do anything they want, and I can drive them wherever they want. Sundays are my day, I can also do anything I want, such as go out and hang out with my Thai friends- stuff like that. Now they are able to write all 44 characters, which is great. But now there's a problem. My daughter would ask, so what is this character in English, mom? She wants me to compare every Thai character to an English character, which one sounds the same, something like that. But I can't explain, it's different and difficult.

Sometimes, I have to be like, umm, honey, let me go to Barnes and Noble first to read, and I'll come back to tell you later.

Cassandra and I began to laugh; she continued her point that sometimes her daughter asks some deep questions, such as, "how come people do not speak the same language? How come girls cannot sit next to Buddhist monks? How come we have to pray everyday?" When Cassandra cannot answer, she tells her daughter to hold on while she goes to do some research at the library. We both laughed again, and I realized that Cassandra was actually a funny woman.

We kept talking about her daughter for a while, and I wondered aloud if her son was also asking the same kind of questions, and if he was as enthusiastic as his sister. Cassandra shook her head as she answered, "No, not really. He doesn't really ask but he will do whatever his sister does, like writing Thai characters. If his sister doesn't do it, he won't do it. But fortunately, he doesn't resist like other kids. Thus, I don't want to push them too much."

I nodded and I actually agreed with Cassandra I thought to myself that parents should not push their children too much; otherwise they might grow hostility towards the language. But on the other hand, without any push, they will not likely to be able to speak Thai. It is rare to find an enthusiastic child like her daughter who actually wants and eagers to learn her mother's language. Cassandra assured me that she does not force her children, but instead emphasizes why they should be learning and what the benefits are to them. She described her life when she was younger:

When I was young, my parents didn't have much money. I tried my hardest to get a college scholarship. I did everything so I could study in a college. I know how important education is. Some people will never know until it's too late because they were fed with everything, education, money, toys, and stuff. They would never know how difficult it is to be ambitious because they had it all. But I know- I know, from my own experience that it is very important. So I always remind my kids why they should learn this and that. Why they should be proud of what they have while other kids don't have.

As Cassandra and I continued the conversation about how important it is to study, I asked her, "What do you tell your kids about how important Thai language is to them? Why should they learn Thai?" Reflecting on my questions, Cassandra responded:

I explain to them that it is important because it is their mother's language. They are half Thai and that makes it their language too. Furthermore, I tell them that if they want to talk with grandma, they should learn to speak Thai because grandma doesn't speak English. And then they asked why grandma doesn't learn to speak English. I tell them that because grandma is too old, it's more difficult for her to learn a new language and it's much easier for you to learn Thai because you are still very young. Then I teach them to be respectful to elders especially to grandparents and parents.

Cassandra spent quite a bit of time talking about respect. She said that children always have to respect the elders no matter what. I have been taught the same thing all my life. It is embedded in Thai culture. Cassandra said that she was lucky to have her



mother in Alaska with her so her mother can teach her children to be respectful to others, as well as teach Thai to her children: “It’s very time consuming.” Cassandra talked more about teaching Thai, which led her to reflect that, “I’m a working mom.”

... Sometimes, when I get home from work, I have no energy left to teach them Thai. It’s very exhausting, sometimes. But when I think about other half Thai-American children who can speak Thai fluently, I would have more inspiration to teach my kids because I know it’s possible, even though it takes a lot of time and energy.

I nodded in agreement that teaching a language to someone sounds very difficult. I remembered that Cassandra mentioned that when she first moved to the United States she was living with her husband’s parents in New Jersey, and preferred speaking English because everybody else around her was speaking English. I asked whether she had difficulties or any kind of challenges in adapting herself to the new environment. Cassandra replied that she did not have much difficulty in terms of language because she was familiar with English even before she moved to the United States. But she missed Thailand very much. She also had to learn how to drive a car.

I stopped to drink my frappuccino then I asked Cassandra about her expectations regarding her children’s learning the Thai language. She paused to think for a moment and said that she is doing her best trying to teach them Thai, but that she does not want to push them too much. If she has enough money in the future, she will send her children to a summer class in Thailand to learn Thai language. But this is all up to her children to decide whether they want to do it or not.

As our conversation began to wind down, I asked Cassandra if she had anything to add regarding Thai language, to which she replied:

Thai language, umm, each person thinks differently. Sometimes, those moms who live in America and have mixed kids like I do, ummm, even though their kids can't speak, read, or write Thai, ummm, sometimes, it doesn't mean that those moms didn't try hard enough or didn't care. It might be because those kids don't want to learn or because of the environment. Environment has big impact on people. Look at us, Jane. Even though we grew up in Thailand, speak Thai all our lives, but sometimes we still can't find the right Thai words to say, we have to use English words to express our feelings in Thai conversation, right? That's the power of the environment here. Everybody speaks English and sometimes it makes us forget our own language.

I nodded in agreement with what she said. "It's external factor," I said. "Yes, external factor really has impact on us," Cassandra noted. Then I asked Cassandra if she had anything else to share, and she said that she was out of things to say, thanking me for interviewing her. I thanked her for the interview as well, and switched off my voice recorder. Her phone suddenly rang, as if the caller knew that we were done with the interview. The interview had lasted around 45 minutes, so I said goodbye to her and let her talk on her phone.

### ***3.5 Jessica's Conversational Interview***

Jessica is a mother of a six-year-old boy, and was very enthusiastic about the interview. I called her a week before to explain what my research was about, and she agreed to meet with me right away. We have known each other for a few years. I was in Alaska with the Work and Travel program many summers ago, and I met her at a Thai restaurant. She is a very cheerful person, very talkative, and very kind. She received her bachelor's degree in business from a university in Thailand. She arrived at the bookstore coffee shop with her son on one Sunday afternoon. We had agreed to meet there so that her son could read and play with other children in the store while Jessica and I conducted an interview. However, her son was not in a very good mood and did not want to play with other children. He wanted to stay with his mom, and kept asking questions, interrupting the interview a few times. I did not mind as I thought he was cute. I talked to him in Thai to see if he understood me, but he did not answer my question. I was not sure if it was because he did not understand my question, or if it was because he did not want to talk to me. I have seen him many times before, and I never heard him speak Thai. One time I asked him what he was doing in Thai. He was playing on his Nintendo game. He said, "I'm playing a game," in English. Jessica and I could not find a quiet spot in Starbucks on Sunday afternoon. There were many people talking to each other, laughing, drinking coffee, and reading books by the fireplace. We decided to sit at the only empty table, right in the middle of everything. Despite the loud noise from other people, coffee machines, and everything else, our interview went well.

I handed an informed consent form to Jessica, let her read the form, and asked if she had any questions about it. She did not have any questions. I then explained a little further what my research was about and why I chose this topic. She said that it was an interesting topic, that she was proud to know that a Thai woman was doing a research on Thai people, and that she felt special that I chose her as my co-researcher. I thanked her for letting me interview her and gave her a big smile.

First off, I asked Jessica what language does she speak to her son. Jessica answered immediately that she speaks both English and Thai to her only son, and that she uses more Thai with her son at home, and uses more English when they are out. Suddenly, her son interrupted the interview. He walked to our table with a game magazine in his little hands. He pointed out a picture in the magazine to me and told me that he also had that particular game. I smiled at him and told him in Thai that I do not have this game. I asked if he understood what I said, and he did not answer. Jessica told her son, in Thai, to go play with other children because she and I were having an interview. Her son asked in English, “What’s that mean?” “We are interviewing now,” said Jessica, and he walked away. I chuckled a little bit at this point, and restated Jessica’s answer to get us back to the interview mode, “So you speak Thai at home?” Jessica explained that she speaks Thai at home, but is not at home all the time because she spends most of her time at work. She has two jobs. When she speaks Thai to her son, often times he does not understand what she tries to say. Jessica noted that she believes that it is because she did not speak Thai to her son right away after he was born. “When

did you start speaking Thai to your son then?” I asked. She looked up the ceiling and said that she started speaking Thai to her son when he was three years old.

At this point, I wanted to know what made her decide to speak Thai to her son. I asked Jessica, “Why did you change?, why did you start speaking Thai to him when he was three years old? What was the reason?” Reflecting on my question, Jessica explained:

At first I didn't speak any Thai to my son because for one, I had just moved to America for one year. I gave birth to him after only a year of being here, it was too soon, we didn't expect it. Back then, my English was very poor, my husband and I had a hard time understanding each other. Therefore, I had to learn English to communicate better with my husband as well as other people. I thought that, umm, I thought that English was the key to benefits.... there were only three of us at home—my son, my husband, and me. Every time I turn around, I saw my husband- there was no one else, not my mom, not my dad, not my sisters- just my husband and I had to speak English with him. After a while, I got used to speaking English. I didn't want to, you know, speak English with my husband for one second and turn around to my baby to speak Thai. It's confusing you know? So I was like, “Ok, whatever, let's just use English.” Until he was three years old, I realized that being bilingual would give my son a lot of benefits in the future. I, at the time, was better at English than I was three years ago. And my husband started to push me to teach Thai to our son. He said that he wished he could speak Thai and he thought his son would want that too.

“So,” I responded, “Your husband is supporting the idea of teaching Thai to your son?” Jessica nodded, “Yeah.”

Because Jessica mentioned that speaking Thai would bring many benefits to her son’s life in the future. I asked what type of benefits was Jessica thinking about. Jessica responded:

I don’t know which country my son would want to live in the future; America or Thailand. It’s up to him where he wants to live. But right now I’m giving him a chance, umm, an opportunity, umm, alternatives- for him. He can choose whichever language he wants, but I’m providing him with both languages now. And being bilingual, he gets a better chance of getting a better job. It’s not like I’m forcing him, or anything. But you know, he’s half Thai, so I want him to be able to know both languages. I would be very proud. But if in the end, he can’t speak Thai, I think it’s my fault that I don’t have much time to spend with him. I have 2 jobs. I get off work when he’s already in bed. I get off work at 10 pm.

I nodded to acknowledge her point, and I noticed that her pitch had changed. It was not as cheerful as normal. She was looking down at the table. I sat up straight and looked at her in the eyes: “It must be very exhausting,” I said. She nodded many times, slowly:

Very exhausting. I work hard for my family and for my parents. It’s my job to take care of my parents; I wire some money every month for my parents in Thailand. They never asked for it, but you know, I want to do it. And so- we have

the baby too soon, we didn't save a lot of money for the baby yet- so I have to work very hard

I nodded and I felt strongly emotionally involved. When she said that she had the baby too soon, I anticipated that she was not ready to have a baby and that things were not going according to her plans. I asked her to explain more about having the baby too soon. Jessica indicated that:

It was not what I planned. I wasn't ready. I moved here for only one year and I gave birth. I had to learn how to speak English, learn the new culture, learn to adapt to the new society, and most importantly, learn about my husband.

Everything. Then I had to find a job. Well, everything was coming towards me at once. What I planned was, umm, gradually, not suddenly.

I felt that the interview was making her a little bit too depressed, so I redirected it back to Thai language. I wondered aloud what kind of things Jessica did to support her child in learning Thai, other than talking to him in Thai. "I hired a Thai babysitter who can teach Thai," Jessica answered. She commented that it is difficult to find a Thai babysitter because most of the Thai women in Fairbanks have jobs already, and those who do not have jobs are either too old or are full time mothers. I wondered if the babysitter that she hired did a good job, and if her son's Thai improved. Jessica replied:

Not really, because the babysitter had just recently moved to America. She also wanted to learn to speak English. When my son didn't speak Thai back at her, she decided to just speak English with my son. She wasn't being firm or forceful enough.

“I see,” I responded, having noticed already that her son understands some Thai, but does not really speak it, at least not to me. On this note, I inquired about how much her son actually understands. Jessica said that he could understand more than half, “Around 70%, I think. I’m trying to push him harder now; my plan is to send him to a summer class in Thailand every year when he turns 10 years old. I want to send him to a host family who can only speak Thai.”

“70% is quite good,” I thought to myself. Continuing on this train of thought, I asked, “So, he does quite well in listening, what about speaking?” Jessica paused for a few seconds, sat up straight in her chair, cleared her throat, and answered:

Well, I have spoiled him a lot. I should have pushed him to speak Thai harder. I normally let it go when I asked questions in Thai and he answered in English. I didn’t think that it was a big deal then. But now, I see that he doesn’t try to speak Thai; if I ask him to speak Thai, he turns quiet on me. For him it’s like, ‘if I’m not speaking English, I’m not saying anything.’

“I see,” I responded with a nod. For some reason, it sounded like her son does not really care for the language. I wondered if her son likes anything Thai at all, so I asked, “Does he like Thai cartoons?” Jessica nodded and smiled as she said, “Yes, very much so! We have a lot of Thai cartoons, Thai movies, Thai music, and Thai books at home. He loves to watch Thai cartoons and movies.”

I paused for a few seconds to think about what my next question was going to be. I knew that he likes Thai cartoons and movies, so I asked if he likes Thailand and if he uses Thai language when he visits Thailand at all. Jessica looked to the side at someone



was waving at her—a regular customer at a restaurant she works at. She turned back to face me and answered:

Last time we were in Thailand, one day I had some errands to run so I left my son with a family friend who does not speak any English for many hours. When I got back, she told me that my son was great, and could communicate in basic Thai conversations like, I'm hungry, I want this, I want that, and so on. But when I got back, he switched his language mode to English right away to speak with me.

“He's used to speaking English with you,” I said. “Yeah,” Jessica agreed.

Referring back to the benefits that Jessica thought speaking Thai would bring to her son, I asked if her son ever asked her why he had to study Thai, and if yes, what she told him. Jessica paused a little bit before revealing that her son has asked her many times why he had to speak Thai. She told him that it is because he is half Thai-half American. He is supposed to know both languages, be respectful with both languages. She also told him that if he could speak Thai, then he could talk to his grandparents, and other Thai people when he visits Thailand. ‘Thai people would be so proud of you,’

Hearing that answer, I asked Jessica, “So you expect your son to speak Thai?” Jessica said, “Of course,” she expected her son to be able to speak Thai. She also said that she would not force him to be whatever she wants. It has to be his choice whether he wants to learn Thai or not. All she can do now is to offer him as many alternatives as possible and let him choose by himself. “I want the best for him,” Jessica said with a smile. She talked for quite a while about what she wanted her son to have before we were interrupted again. This time, her son wanted to have a cookie, so I told Jessica that we

could take a break. When she returned to the table, after buying the cookie, I asked if her she feels discouraged at all when her son does not speak Thai back to her. She shook her head no, with a slight smile and said, “I may sometimes feel tired, but never feel discouraged. I won’t give up. I won’t push him too hard or force him to speak, but I will gradually step by step teach him to speak.”

Feeling that our conversation had come to the end, after around 35 minutes, I asked Jessica if she had anything to add. She paused for a few seconds and cleared her throat one more time before noting that:

I want every mom who has mixed children to teach their heritage language to their children. It’s very important and very beneficial to their children. At the moment, people who can speak more than one language have better career opportunities. Even American couples who do not speak any other language but English buy a language program for their children because they also want their kids to be bilingual.

I nodded and thanked her for the interview. After I switched off the voice recorder, I asked what her plans for today were. She said that she was going to have lunch with her Thai friend, Cassandra, at a Chinese restaurant. Suddenly, her phone rang; her friends were outside the bookstore to pick up her and her son. As we left, I saw Cassandra and her daughter in their truck. I greeted them and got to talk to Cassandra’s daughter a little bit. I asked her in Thai where her brother was, and she answered right away, in English, “He’s at home.”

### ***3.6 Erin's Conversational Interview***

Erin, a mother of two children, is in her late fifties. I had a little trouble finding a time that would work for her because she is a very busy woman. She owns a busy hair salon; her schedule is always back-to-back. She and I had agreed to meet on a Monday morning when the number of customers is usually at its least, however, on this particular Monday, she could only meet me for twenty minutes. Erin has two children, one girl and one boy. Neither of whom speak Thai. I have met them a few times when I get my hair cut.

When I arrived at her salon right at 10 am, she was busy finishing a customer's hair, so I sat on a chair for about 5 minutes. When the customer left, Erin went inside the kitchen and brought me a cup of coffee. I thanked her with a smile, and although I do not usually drink coffee, but I could not say no when an elder offers me something. It is our culture. We sat down in one corner of the salon—face to face. I immediately handed her my informed consent form and quickly explained what my research was about. I rushed through this process because I knew that customers could walk in at anytime and I did not want to take her away for too long from her work.

I asked Erin if she had any questions before we began the interview. She indicated she did not, so I began by asking: "Did you want your kids to be able to speak both languages?" Erin nodded many times before she answered:

Yes, I wanted them to speak both languages. However, my kids were born in the states, umm, when they started to go to school, they became, umm, they became

embarrassed. They didn't want to speak Thai. They felt embarrassed. They only know some Thai vocabularies but they never wanted to speak.

"I see," I responded. To be honest, I did not understand why her children would feel embarrassed to speak Thai. When I was in school, I always wanted to be able to speak other languages. Many of my friends in Thailand also wanted to learn a second language. I forced my mind back to focus on the interview. "Umm, did you speak Thai to them when they were born?" I continued. Erin nodded yes and said that she tried, but she was the only one trying. There was no one else to tell her to keep trying, and keep speaking: "I didn't have enough patience, I didn't have anyone who tell me that I was doing a good job, or tell me to keep it up." Erin looked at me straight in my eyes, and continued to explain in more detail:

My husband speaks English and whenever I spoke Thai to my kids, they looked at their father and asked their father what I was saying, something like that. I felt like they were confused because they didn't want to speak to me. Thus I gave up speaking Thai with them. Frankly, I should have kept speaking Thai with them, no matter- no matter if they understood or not. Umm, but I didn't, didn't, umm- back then I didn't think about that. I just gave up and decided to just speak English with my kids because they didn't want to listen, didn't want to speak. So I just gave up. Do you understand?

"Yes, yes, I do," I responded with a nod. I was about to ask her another question but Erin kept going, "Then we they grew up a little and went to school, they told me not to speak Thai at their school because they felt embarrassed." I raised my voice to a very

high pitch, “Really, is that so?” “Yes, my kids were pretty embarrassed.” I asked if both of her children felt embarrassed or just one of them. She indicated that both of her children were the same way but her son felt more embarrassed.

I asked how old her children were. “My son is 18 and my daughter is 20 years old, but you know what? They really want to be able to speak Thai now,” Erin answered with a big laugh. I laughed with her. She explained that both of her children now wish they could speak Thai, but that they still do not try to speak, and are too shy to start: “Want to speak, but too shy at the same time, you know?” Because I did not understand why they felt so embarrassed, so I asked Erin, “Were they picked on and made fun in school because of the language?” “No, no, nothing like that,” She responded. At this point, I still wondered why they felt so embarrassed if they were not made fun of, so I asked her, “Then why are they still embarrassed?” Erin explained that it was because they were born here in America. American people speak English and they did not want to be different. “I see,” I responded. “Yeah, something like that,” then she sighed and added, “So I was like, whatever, if they don’t want to speak, then don’t. Because I can’t force them to; they have to want to do it, you know?”

Not knowing how long she had been running the salon. I asked Erin whether she was working when she gave birth to her children. “Nope, I didn’t work. I stayed home with my children. My husband worked alone at the time,” Erin answered. Her answer led me to the next question, “So, what about your husband? Did he want his children to speak Thai at all?” Erin answered right away, “He was okay with anything. Of course, he

wanted his kids to speak Thai, but at the same time, he didn't want to push them or force them. He wanted his kids to make their own decisions."

I saw an opportunity to talk more about her children wanting to speak Thai, so I asked Erin to tell me more. Erin revealed that both of them really want to speak Thai, and want to go visit Thailand to learn Thai: they "Reeeally, reeeeeeally want to learn Thai now." We both began to laugh. I was very curious at this point:

"So, what did you tell them after you found out that they now want to speak Thai?" She began:

I told them to stop being shy and start to actually say something in Thai. If they keep being shy, they won't be able to speak. I told them to look at me as an example. When I was learning how to speak English, I wasn't being shy. I tried saying things out loud, didn't care if I was wrong, and didn't care if the structure of the sentences was actually not right- something like that. I kept trying and trying. No time to be shy, otherwise you won't be able to learn.

"True," I said and nodded in agreement. Erin continued with a louder voice and faster rate:

That's right, if we are shy, we won't be able to speak the language. Even though it's not the right word or not the right grammar, we must speak it out and have somebody else correct us, right? This is the way to do it. This is what I think effective. You must say it and have someone else correct it for you. And then you keep trying, keep on going. You know, but my kids don't do it. They don't, umm, don't think this way. They are too shy and they don't even want to open their

mouths and try. I keep telling them not to be shy, just say it out loud, and I will correct them if they aren't right.

I liked how confident she was. I totally agreed with her technique because that is how I learned English and other languages. I asked Erin if her children finally started to try to speak after hearing their mom's technique. Erin shook her head.

Nope! They still don't speak! But when my employee (she's Thai) and I talk, they would be like, "I know what you guys are talking about."

We both began to laugh. Right then, a customer walked into the salon. I told Erin that she could go and I could wait. But she said that it was okay and told me to keep going. She turned to the customer and told the customer to take a seat and wait for a moment.

I asked Erin how long she had been living in the USA. "20 years," she replied. "Were there any difficulties or any challenges when you first moved to America?" I continued. Erin paused for a little bit and said that she had a hard time adjusting to the weather. She did not like Alaska winter at all; in fact she hated it so much. But after three years, she fell in love with Alaska. Erin continued about winters in Alaska and how she experienced the coldness when she first came here. She mentioned that Alaska is her home. She loves Alaska very much. When she visited Thailand with the intention to stay for two months, she could stay for only one month because she missed Alaska too much.

I asked if her children went to Thailand with her. "Yes, they did," Erin replied. "Oh, and how did they communicate with their grandparents?" I asked. Erin indicated that she had to be a translator all the time for her children and her parents. She explained

further that her children really wanted to speak Thai after the last time they visited Thailand. “Oooooo, they really want to speak Thai. I mean, really want to speak Thai. They bought Thai vocabulary books. I bought some Thai books for them too. They studied while they were in Thailand, but when they came back to Alaska, they stopped!”

Erin laughed and I gave her a big smile. “At least they actually tried. That’s something,” I thought to myself. Because I wanted to know about other difficulties or challenges when she moved here, I asked, “So you had to adjust yourself to the weather, what about the language?” Erin answered right away that she took an ESL class three hours a day, three times a week. She added that she was not good at English at all when she first came, and she tried her hardest to learn the language. Even after she gave birth, she still went to the ESL class regularly. Her reply led me to ask if it was because of her trying to be good at English that she chose to speak English to her children. Erin confirmed that it was one of the reasons, “Yes, yes, yes, you are absolutely right, Jane! I tried to speak Thai and when they seemed like they didn’t want to listen, I went for English right away because I was learning it too.” I concluded, “So English it is.” And Erin responded, “Yeah, English, but if they ever want to speak Thai, then they can learn later if they want. I can’t force them you know. I told them to speak Thai with me, they never did. So I gave up.”

I continued the conversation by asking if Erin thought that a mixed person should be able to speak both languages. Erin did not answer right away, but then began:

Umm, I don’t think, umm, I don’t think that it is necessary, but if they can, it’s good for them. Because being able to speak both languages, they can



communicate with people from both countries, right? When they go to Thailand, they will be able to understand and speak to Thai people, umm, it's, it's- one language is not good. Just like us; if we can only speak Thai but we live in America, this is definitely bad because we wouldn't know what to do, how to say, what things mean, and all that. Right? When we live in America, we should be able to speak English, we should try to learn English. Same as my children, if they want to live in Thailand, then they must learn how to speak Thai language, right?

Erin added that she would be very proud if her children could actually speak Thai: "I would be proud, but more importantly, they will get direct benefits like job opportunities, if they ever want to live in Thailand. I nodded as she continued:

It's very difficult to learn. Right now if anyone in Fairbanks gave birth, I always tell them to keep going, keep speaking Thai to their kids no matter what. Doesn't matter if they respond, just keep going and be patient. Then their kids will be able to speak Thai because I know from my own experience. I didn't have enough patience. Patience is the key.

I was satisfied with the interview even though it only had been only about fifteen minutes, and I did not want to keep her customer waiting for any longer. So I asked Erin if she had anything to add, and she did not, so I thanked her for the interview and switched off the voice recorder. Erin told me to come back if I wanted more information from her. I gave her a big smile and said, "khob kun kha," which means "thank you."

## Chapter 4

### Human Science Research Analysis

In this final chapter, I present my interpretations of my six co-researchers' experience regarding their children's heritage language usage. My interpretations arose from my study of the past literature of second-generation children, and from the meanings that my co-researchers and I co-constructed during the conversational interviews. I transcribed the interviews, and after many rounds of listening to them, constructed the narrative stories presented in the previous chapter. Throughout this process, I looked for commonalities among the co-researchers' lived experiences. I slowly and carefully read through the transcripts in order to find emergent words and phrases represented the shared common experiences of the co-researchers, and used those words and phrases to identify the themes that I saw as emerging out of the lived experiences of my six co-researchers. First I present those themes and sub-themes, then I present conclusions of my research, and finally, I discuss implications for future research.

#### ***4.1 Theme One: It's My Children's Future. I Want the Best for Them.***

The first noticeable commonality among the entire group of women was that each co-researcher expressed in different ways that they were concerned about their child/children. The sub-themes are: (a) They might live in Thailand some day, (b) Pushing and Forcing, (c) It's their life; they get to choose, not me, (d) It's very difficult, and (e) I couldn't do it without him.

**4.1.1 Sub-theme: *They Might Live in Thailand Some Day.*** Four out of six co-researchers expressed in the interviews that they wanted the best for their child's life and they would do anything to make sure that their child would be able to speak Thai because they saw many benefits of being a bilingual. In particular, these four co-researchers believed that being able to speak Thai would help their child in the future if he or she ever wanted to live in Thailand, even though they mothers did not know whether their child/children would choose to live in there or not. Amy mentioned when discussing how important Thai language was to her daughter that, "She won't be deceived or tricked. She won't feel like an outsider." Linda felt that it would be best for her child to speak Thai because "it's for her future. We don't know where she's going to choose to live. She might meet someone in Thailand, or might want to help Thai people in some ways. It's in the future; but we want to hand her many alternative choices." Cassandra noted that in being able to speak Thai, their children would be "able to understand other cultures and situations better than people who don't speak the language." That is, if their children were able to speak Thai, they would understand Thai culture better and would have more knowledge on how to think, act, and live in Thailand. Much like Linda, Jessica mentioned that, "It's up to him where he wants to live. But right now I'm giving him a chance, umm, an opportunity, umm, alternatives, for him." All four co-researchers were very clear that the ability to communicate in Thai is a major key for living in Thailand in the future, and this first sub-theme is related to the second sub-theme.

**4.1.2 Sub-theme: *Pushing and Forcing*.** Because these four mothers think that Thai language is important for their children—in case their children choose to live in Thailand some day, to have better job opportunity, and to understand other cultures and situations better. They are doing whatever it takes to make sure that their children are in fact learning the language, including pushing and forcing their children to learn and practice Thai everyday, pretending to be angry unless their child speaks Thai to them, hiring Thai babysitters who do not speak English, having a Thai speaking grandmother take care of the children, forcing their child to write the Thai alphabet everyday, and reading and telling bed time stories in Thai and asking questions afterwards. Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe (2009) reported that many mothers are willing to spend time, money, and energy to help their children to learn their heritage language. As Amy put it, she has to “pretend to be angry” to get her daughter to speak Thai to her. Her daughter is being pushed to speak Thai with her mother, otherwise her mother would be mad. Linda is also being forceful with her child in order to get her to keep speaking Thai: “I told her that I didn’t understand, and I told her that she must speak Thai to me.” Cassandra brought her mother from Thailand to stay with her children while Cassandra is at work. The fact that Cassandra’s mother does not speak any English at all forces her children to learn to speak Thai: “if my kids want to eat or do something, they have to learn Thai to speak with my mom.” And Jessica also mentioned that she would not give up and would do whatever it takes to make sure that her son is going to be a Thai speaker: “I left my son with a family friend who does not speak any English for many hours.”

Nesteruk (2010) indicated that second-generation children typically become English-dominant or even English monolingual by the time they reach adolescence. The most significant factors that help in maintaining the heritage language among children of immigrants are that they have parents who share the same native language and use it at home, and that they have friends of the same origin and supportive ethnic networks (p. 273). However, these Thai mothers do not have Thai-speaking husbands, hence they are alone in using the language at home, and in providing support for their children's use of Thai. As a result of pushing and forcing them, the children of these four women are capable of understanding Thai. Some of the children have a high level of proficiency in understanding and communicating in Thai, while others do not actually speak the language, but they do understand it most of the time.

On the other hand, Erin mentioned that she did not want to force or push her children to learn Thai because she did not want to confuse her children with two languages at the same time, "I felt like they were confused because they didn't want to speak to me" However, other mothers were sure that their children would not be confused and could handle both languages at the same time. Amy expressed that children's brains can easily adapt to both languages and differentiate between them like a "switch on and switch off button." Similarly, Linda noted that, "Kids are smart, they can separate the two languages in their little brains. They are capable of knowing different languages." Amanda indicated that she heard her daughter speaks Spanish after watching Spanish cartoons on TV, "I then realized that she's capable of learning other languages." These mothers recognized that it was possible to learn two languages at the same time, but it

was difficult, took time, and took a lot of effort. That is why they kept pushing and forcing their children to learn the language.

Some of the children who had been pushed to learn Thai clearly resisted learning the language. Some of the mothers kept on trying to teach even though they noticed that their children resisted learning Thai, while some gave up because they noticed that their children were reluctant. These findings are consistent with Park and Sarkar's 2007 study that found parents were unwilling to force their children to learn Korean if the children were reluctant.

**4.1.3 Sub-theme: *It's Their Life; They Get to Choose, Not Me.*** While some mothers are willing to do anything to ensure that their child will be able to communicate in Thai, including forcing their child to speak Thai, other mothers prefer letting their child decide what he/she wants. As Amanda put it, "I let them decide whether they want to learn, it's their life, and I don't want to force them." Even though Amanda admitted that Thai language is important because it provides better family ties, she did not want to force her children to study it. Erin also expressed that she did not want to force her children to learn the language. She indicated that "they have to want to do it." Her children have to want to learn Thai because they want to learn, not because she wants them to learn. Jessica indicated that even though she tried to push her son to learn Thai by talking in Thai with him, but she would let her son decide on his own whether he wants to speak back in Thai or not.

**4.1.4 Sub-theme: *It's Very Difficult.*** All of my co-researchers remarked that teaching Thai to their children was very difficult and time consuming. Amy mentioned, "It is a very difficult language. It has many different tones, and different tones create different meanings. It's very difficult." Amanda said, "Learning Thai takes a very long time for them to be able to communicate in Thai." Linda admitted that Thai language is difficult, "It really depends on the parents—how hard they try, because it's undoubtedly very, very difficult." Cassandra revealed in her story that, "It's very exhausting sometimes. But when I think about other half Thai-American children who can speak Thai fluently, I would have more inspiration to teach my kids because I know it's possible, even though it takes a lot of time and energy." Jessica said that, "It's very exhausting. I may sometimes feel tired, but never feel discouraged. I won't give up." Lastly, Erin mentioned "It's very difficult to learn." These experiences were consistent with Park and Sarkar's (2007) study. The researchers reported that some parents admitted that it was very difficult to teach Korean language to their children since their children's study load was already a big challenge. In their conversational interview, Zhang and Slaughter-Defoe (2009) indicated that the majority of children reported that they think Chinese is a difficult language to learn and they would rather enjoy their weekend with their friends.

**4.1.5 Sub-theme: *I Couldn't Do It without Him.*** Many of the co-researchers mentioned that it was because their husband's support that kept them teaching their child Thai. Amy mentioned, "My husband is very supportive. He wants our daughter to be able to speak Thai. He also thinks that it is important for our daughter to be bilingual."

Amanda revealed that, “my husband really wants to speak Thai and also wants our kids to be able to speak Thai. But he understands that it’s very difficult language and it takes a long time to learn.” Linda said, “Without him, I would have given up a long time ago. Without him, my daughter wouldn’t be able to speak Thai. It’s very difficult, Jane. Very difficult to teach someone to speak Thai, without him, I wouldn’t be able to.” Cassandra talked about her husband’s support in the interview. She indicated that her husband “can speak a little bit of Thai” and supported her to teach Thai to their children. Similarly, Jessica also noted “he said that he wished he could speak Thai and he thought his son would want that too.” The only person who did not get much support from the husband was Erin. She indicated that her husband was “okay with anything. Of course he wanted his kids to speak Thai, but at the same time, he didn’t want to push them or force them. He wanted his kids to make their own decisions.” Erin also mentioned that “I was the only one trying, I didn’t have anyone who tell me that I was doing a good job, or tell me to keep it up.”

#### ***4.2 Theme Two: I Was Struggling When I First Moved Here.***

The second theme that I found among my co-researchers concerned the affects of the mother’s adjustment ot her new situation living in the USA. Five of my six co-researchers revealed that they had a hard time at the beginning of their relocation. Kim’s cross-cultural adaptation theory (2004) explains that a person moving into a new environment is likely to face an internal struggle to regain control over their life in an unfamiliar and challenging environment, which may include a new job and a new language. These adjustments impacted the language learning environment of their



children. There are two sub-themes including (a) Mother's language adjustment and (b) Mother's work adjustment.

**4.2.1 Sub-theme: *Language Adjustment*.** Kim (2004) explains that one way to regain control over one's life in a new environment is to learn the language. All of my co-researchers can speak English; although, their levels of proficiency vary. Some mothers are fluent in English while others are not. Neither Amy nor Cassandra had difficulties because they were fluent in English when they immigrated. However the other four co-researchers did face difficulties. These Thai mothers were stressed about their lack of English proficiency, and began to study English by taking evening classes at the Fairbanks Literacy Council, or studied it by themselves at home, practicing it with their husbands and children. Amanda mentioned that she had to study English when she first moved to Fairbanks and "practiced her English together with her child." Jessica expressed that her English "was very poor." She felt the need to learn English in order to get a job and to do things. Linda also noted the struggle she was having at the beginning of her stay in Alaska: "I tried and tried to speak English, I didn't care if I was saying it correctly or not." Being able to speak English in Alaska was an important aspect that all my co-researchers mentioned during the interview. Many of my co-researchers mentioned that they had to improve their English language skills in order to better communicate with their husband and with others in the society. Erin mentioned that she took an ESL class three hours a day and three times a week. Many immigrants in Worthy's (2006) study believed that their own personal, social, and economic quality of life would be greatly enhanced by knowing English. This is consistent with my co-

researchers' experiences, however, because they were working to learn English in order to survive their new environment, their attentions were drawn to study and to ESL classes, leaving less time to teach their children Thai when they first moved to the United States.

**4.2.2 Sub-theme: Work Adjustment.** Three out of the six co-researchers also reported that they were working while raising their child, and all mentioned that work was one of the important factors in whether their child could speak Thai or not because work leads some mothers to speak English with their child; therefore, Thai is getting compromised by the issue. Stay-at-home mothers admitted that they had more time to teach their child to speak Thai. Amy mentioned that she spent twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week with her daughter.

Martinez and Wang (2009) reported in their study that the wage differential between immigrants who speak English and those who do not equaled 46 percent. Non-English speaking immigrants often need to work two or three minimum-wage jobs in order to sustain their family. This research is likewise consistent with my co-researchers' experience. Jessica, Amanda, and Cassandra all expressed that they were struggling to manage more than one job while raising their child. Cassandra expressed that, "I wish I had more time at home with my kids, but I got work to do. I can't just stay home and be a full-time mom." Jessica mentioned that, "I have 2 jobs, and I don't have much time to spend with my son. I get off work when he's already in bed." Some of the mothers mentioned that because their work required them to speak English, and because they spent most of their time at work, they got used to speaking English all the time. As

Amanda said, “I brought my daughter to work everyday and I always speak English to her because I also have to speak English with customers.”

#### ***4.3 Theme Three: This is OUR language.***

All of my co-researchers felt strongly that Thai language is our language. Thai language was important to them, and important for their child to learn Thai because their child/children are also Thai. Ethnic identity and family ties are important to these Thai mothers.

***4.3.1 Sub-theme: My Child Has Thai Blood.*** Amy stated, “My daughter also has Thai blood.” In the study, Park and Sarkar (2007), who revealed that parents would like their children to speak their heritage language because they wanted to keep their ethnic identity. They recognized that their heritage language is central to their ethnicity. This is consistent with my co-researchers’ experiences in remarking that they wanted their children to speak Thai because their children have a Thai mother, and therefore, they are Thai as well. Cassandra pointed out that her children should be proud of what they are, “I tell them that I’m proud to be the way I am, I’m proud to be Thai and you should be proud too.” Jessica expressed that learning Thai is important because, “you are half Thai-half American; therefore, you are supposed to know both languages.” Similarly with Zhang and Slaughter-Defoe (2009) study found that Chinese parents seemed to be proud of their ethnicity, culture, and language. They emphasized that it is a shame if a Chinese person cannot speak Chinese because they tended to see the Chinese language itself as the key characteristic of their ethnic group. Most of the Thai mothers in this study felt the same way.

These mothers' experiences were consistent with Phinney's (1992) components model of ethnic and cultural identities. The model suggests that there are three components to Asian Americans' ethnic identities: 1) affective, 2) cognitive, and 3) behavioral. The affective component involves Asian Americans' having sense of belonging, commitment, and positive attitudes toward their ethnic groups. Many of my co-researchers mentioned that they are proud to be Thai. Linda mentioned that her daughter "is now proud to be different from her friends, and proud to be able to speak two languages. Cassandra remarked that she told her children that "I am proud to be the way I am. I'm proud to be Thai and you should be proud too." Similarly, Jessica said that if her son could speak Thai, "Thai people would be so proud of you."

Second component—cognitive component involves Asian Americans' knowledge about their ethnic groups, including traditions, history, and values of their ethnic groups. This is also consistent with my co-researchers' experiences. Cassandra taught her children about respect, "I teach them to be respectful to elders especially to grandparents and parent—one of the Thai's values. Finally, the behavioral component involves the degree to which Asian Americans engage in the activities associated with their ethnic groups, including eating ethnic foods, speaking the ethnic language, all of my co-researchers speak Thai and eat Thai food.

**4.3.2 Sub-theme: *They Cannot Talk with Their Grandparents.*** Each of my co-researchers also expressed that they wanted to their children to be able to communicate in Thai because it produced better family ties. To communicate with grandparents and other relatives in Thailand is to learn to speak Thai because the majority of Thai people,

especially older persons do not speak English. Zhang and Slaughter-Defoe (2009) reported that their participants recognized their heritage language as a necessary family link. Amanda, whose children do not speak Thai stated that “I actually regret, because, because when we all visit Thailand, visit my parents in Thailand, my parents and my ex-husband’s parents really want to talk with their grandkids, but they can’t communicate. They don’t understand each other.” Amy remarked that if her daughter can speak Thai, “she can participate in the conversations and feel like she’s a part of the family.” Because Cassandra’s mother lives in Fairbanks and helps her raise her children, it is clear to them that “if you want to talk to grandma, you should learn Thai.” Jessica mentioned the same thing, “if he could speak Thai, then he could talk to his grandparents and other Thai people when he visits Thailand.”

#### ***4.4 Theme Four: Embarrassment and resistance***

All of the co-researchers mentioned reactions from their children that make it more difficult for them to teach Thai to their children. There are two sub-themes: (a) My kids are embarrassed and (b) My kids resist learning Thai and ignore me.

***4.4.1 Sub-theme: My Kids are Embarrassed.*** Zhang and Slaughter-Defoe (2009) study found that some of the children in their study reported that their friends would make fun of them if the friends heard them speak Chinese. This study is consistent with Erin’s experience: Erin indicated that, “they told me not to speak Thai at their school because they felt embarrassed.” Cassandra revealed in her story that her son also felt embarrassed, not because he was embarrassed by having a mom who spoke Thai, but he was too embarrassed to speak the language. As Cassandra put it, “...he feels embarrassed

when he can't get the words right. When he says something, people don't understand which word he really means, and people laugh about what he said.”

Shi and Lu's (2007) research pointed out that both internal and external forces pressure immigrant children toward an English preference. The internal force is the desire for social inclusion and conformity, whereas the external factors are the sociopolitical beliefs that operate against outsiders and those who are different. Therefore, when children recognize that English language is the only socially accepted language, they begin to think that their heritage language is useless. This research is also consistent with my co-researchers' stories. Erin mentioned that her children did not want to be “different” than other American children. American children speak English, and so they want to be the same. Additionally, Amanda mentioned that her son stopped using Thai after he started to go to school, even though he was fluent in Thai before he came to the United States. Linda's daughter, fluent in Thai, thought that Thai was not “useful” to her at first because everybody around her spoke English.

Phinney (1992) explains that the more positive Asian Americans' attitudes toward their ethnic groups, the more knowledge they have about their ethnic groups, and the more ethnic behaviors they engage, the stronger their ethnic identity. This is consistent with my co-researchers' children experiences. These children who felt embarrassed see themselves as American, not Thai because they have higher level of the three components toward American society.

**4.4.2 Sub-theme: *My Kids Resist Learning Thai and Ignore Me.*** All of my co-researchers mentioned that their children resisted learning Thai some or all of the time,

and that the children ignored what they asked or tried to say when they spoke in Thai. Nesteruk (2010) reported that some children felt uncomfortable discussing their life issues in their heritage language, so that if the parents kept forcing them to speak the heritage language, their children might just stop discussing the issues altogether and they would lose parent-child connection. This notion is consistent with my co-researchers' experiences. Jessica mentioned that when she asked something in Thai, and asked her son to answer in Thai, "My son would turn quiet on me. For him it's like, 'if I'm not speaking English, I'm not saying anything.'" Similarly, Linda mentioned that, "Sometimes she didn't want to learn; she resisted. She wouldn't speak Thai back at me." Amy mentioned that her daughter "realized that I could speak English, so she started to speak English with me too! If I weren't being forceful, she wouldn't speak Thai to me." Erin made clear in her interview that "they didn't want to speak to me."

#### ***4.5 Conclusion and Implications for Future Research***

The purpose of this research was to employ conversational interview methods to address the question: "What is the lived experience of cross-culture marriage immigrant mothers regarding their children's language usage?" My interpretation of my co-researchers' experiences reinforces previous research, as well as provides new insight into cross-cultural marriages. The four main themes and sub-themes that emerged during the thematic analysis have increased understanding as to what expectations these Thai mothers have regarding their children's Thai language usage. Overall, these Thai mothers expect their children to learn Thai because they think it is beneficial to their children. The children's ability to speak Thai is important because it is (1) the number one key for their

children to live in Thailand, (2) a link for stronger family ties, and (3) central to their ethnic identity.

Many of the mothers are therefore willing to devote as much effort as they can to ensure that their children learn how to communicate in Thai, including pushing and forcing them to do so. While many mothers are willing to push their children to learn Thai, others do not like the idea of forcing: they want their children to decide whether they want to learn Thai or not. Despite all the effort these Thai mothers are willing to make, some of their children do not learn Thai because (1) they feel embarrassed to speak Thai, (2) they do not want to be different than other children in school, (3) they do not see the usefulness of speaking Thai. Other factors that compromise their children's ability to learn Thai are the mother's adjustments to a new language, and the pressures of work.

These results of the study provided some new insights into cross-cultural marriages. As mentioned in the introduction, little research has been done on cross-cultural couples regarding mother's heritage language. Past research suggests that second-generation children whose parents are from the same ethnic background will prefer using English to their heritage language. This study indicates that the same is true for second-generation children in families where the husband does not speak the mother's heritage language. However, the results also show that it is not impossible for these children to be bilingual. It is definitely difficult to teach the heritage language to children in such families, but it is possible.

Referring back to the language situation of Native Alaskans, the results shown in this study provide added insight on why new generations of Native Alaskans are losing



their ability to speak their heritage language. As with Thai-American children, they may feel uncomfortable speaking their native language because not many in the large society speak the language: they feel embarrassed and feel that the Native language is not a useful language. Native Alaskan mothers and fathers may well have some of the same struggles adjusting themselves to this environment. Even though it is not a new environment for them, but the number of outsiders who immigrate to Alaska is increasing day by day. They have to learn how to speak English in order to do business with them, and as the result, they speak English to their children as well.

Further research needs to be conducted. All of my co-researchers mentioned that their husband's support is an important factor in their children's language learning process. A study that includes fathers would help in understanding these issues more, study that examines the mother's educational background would generate new insights as well. Two of my co-researchers have earned a Bachelor's degree and are able to speak English well. Their children are also able to understand Thai, and some of them speak Thai well. However, one mother did not earn a degree yet her daughter is very fluent in Thai. Therefore, I therefore cannot conclude that level of the mother's education is a factor in why her children are able to speak Thai or not.

This study used conversational interview method to gain information about Thai mothers' experiences regarding their children's heritage language usage. If I were to use other methods, such as a survey, I might have gained some similar information regarding issues like "What language do you speak with your child?" or "What do you do to support your child's use of Thai?" However, I would not have been able to get the

mother's confirmation or reaffirmation when there was a misunderstanding. Additionally, I would not have been able to get my co-researcher's experiences, feelings, attitudes, and the world they live in (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). It is difficult to talk about experience in a survey. In conversational interview, I was able to interact with my co-researchers as we co-constructed meanings together. There was simultaneously feedback back and forth between my co-researchers and me.

A researcher who uses conversational interviewing as his/her method of data collection must recognize any personal experiences that might be present while conducting each interview, and must reflexively take influences of these experiences into account in analysis. As the result, I must ensure to be reflexive throughout the research process, and communicate that reflexivity to my readers; which includes providing a description of how personal interest, personality, value orientation, and bias all influence the research that has been conducted. My experiences of being a second-generation child and being a newcomer into the USA might have guided myself to ask the questions I asked to my co-researcher, and might have impacted the ways in which I have interpreted the narratives of my co-researchers.

Thai community in Fairbanks, Alaska is not a big community. There is only one event—Thai Festival, which draws Thai people together once a year. Therefore, many of the Thai-American children do not usually get to hear other people speak Thai other than their mother. Some of the Thai mothers became good friends after they settled in Fairbanks, their families get together over the weekend, creating more chances for their children to hear more Thai. I believe that if there was a Thai language school in

Fairbanks or if Thai people in Fairbanks arranged more meetings, festivals, and other activities, the results for the children's embarrassment and resistance would probably be different. They would probably see the language as more useful and feel more comfortable speaking it.

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Appendix A  
Informed Consent

### Informed Consent Form

Study Title: Thai mothers' expectations for their children's heritage language usage.

IRB# \_\_\_\_\_ Date Approved \_\_\_\_\_

You are being asked to take part in a study about the expectations you have for your children's Thai language usage. The goal of this study is to understand expectations and attitudes mothers have towards the use of Thai language by their U.S. born children in families with a Thai mother and an American father. You are being asked to take part in this study because you are a member of such a family. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before you agree to be in the study.

If you decide to take part, I will interview you for about one hour. The interviews will be audio recorded and kept in my own personal computer for the purpose of transcribing, analysis, and reporting for this study. My thesis advisor, Dr. Robert B. Arundale and I will be the only persons who have the access to the information. All information will be kept in secure files. Your name will not be used and you will not be asked to give your name on any form. You are assured that all your responses in this study will be confidential.

Your decision to take part in this study is voluntary. You are free to choose not to take part in the study or to stop taking part at any time without any penalty to you. If you have any questions now, feel free to ask me. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 907-687-5001 or via email at [jpiyamahapong@alaska.edu](mailto:jpiyamahapong@alaska.edu); or my thesis advisor, Dr. Robert B. Arundale at 907-474-6799 or via email at [rbarundale@alaska.edu](mailto:rbarundale@alaska.edu).

#### Statement of Consent:

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been provided a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_

Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Research Participant & Date



## Appendix B

### Thai Informed Consent

## หนังสือแสดงเจตนายินยอมเข้าร่วมโครงการวิจัย

ชื่องานวิจัย: ความคาดหวังของคุณแม่ชาวไทยในเรื่องของการใช้ภาษาไทยของบุตรที่เกิดในประเทศสหรัฐอเมริกา

IRB# \_\_\_\_\_ วันที่รับรอง \_\_\_\_\_

งานวิจัยนี้เป็นงานวิจัยเกี่ยวกับการคาดหวังที่มารดามีต่อการใช้ภาษาไทยของบุตรที่เกิดในครอบครัวที่ประกอบด้วยผู้ปกครองที่มาจากต่างวัฒนธรรมในประเทศสหรัฐอเมริกา (มารดาเป็นคนไทย และบิดาเป็นชาวอเมริกัน) เพื่อให้เกิดความเข้าใจในทัศนคติของท่านที่มีต่อการเลือกใช้ภาษาสื่อสารของบุตร ท่านได้รับเชิญเข้าร่วมงานวิจัยนี้เนื่องจากท่านมีคุณสมบัติที่งานวิจัยนี้ต้องการ โปรดอ่านข้อมูลอย่างละเอียด หากมีข้อสงสัย ท่านสามารถถามคำถามได้ตลอดเวลา

หากท่านตัดสินใจเข้าร่วมโครงการงานวิจัย ข้าพเจ้าจะทำการสัมภาษณ์ท่านเป็นเวลาประมาณหนึ่งชั่วโมงบทสัมภาษณ์จะถูกทำการบันทึกด้วยเครื่องบันทึกเสียงและจะถูกเก็บไว้เพื่อใช้ในการถอดความหมายวิเคราะห์และรายงานผลการวิจัยเท่านั้น ข้อมูลของท่านจะไม่ถูกนำไปเผยแพร่เพื่อจุดประสงค์อื่นนอกเหนือจากงานวิจัย มีเพียงข้าพเจ้าและอาจารย์ที่ปรึกษาชื่อ Dr. Robert B. Arundale ที่สามารถฟังและอ่านข้อมูลของท่านได้ ข้อมูลทุกอย่างจะถูกเก็บไว้อย่างมิดชิด ชื่อของท่านจะไม่ถูกเปิดเผยไม่ว่าจะเป็นกรณีใดๆก็ตาม

การตัดสินใจเข้าร่วมงานวิจัยของท่านจะเป็นไปด้วยความสมัครใจของท่านเท่านั้น ท่านไม่จำเป็นต้องเข้าร่วมโครงการหากท่านไม่ต้องการและท่านสามารถหยุดการเข้าร่วมโครงการงานวิจัยนี้ได้ทุกเมื่อ ก่อนหรือหลังจากงานวิจัยได้เริ่มขึ้นแล้ว หากท่านมีข้อสงสัยในขณะนี้ กรุณาสอบถามข้าพเจ้าได้ทันที หรือถ้าหากท่านมีข้อสงสัยหลังจากนี้ ท่านสามารถติดต่อข้าพเจ้าได้ที่ 907-687-5001 หรือติดต่อผ่านทางอีเมลได้ที่ [jpiyamahapong@alaska.edu](mailto:jpiyamahapong@alaska.edu); หรือติดต่ออาจารย์ที่ปรึกษา Dr. Robert B. Arundale ได้ที่ 907-474-6799 หรือติดต่อผ่านทางอีเมลได้ที่ [rbarundale@alaska.edu](mailto:rbarundale@alaska.edu)

ข้อความแสดงเจตนายินยอมเข้าร่วมโครงการงานวิจัย:

ข้าพเจ้าเข้าใจโครงการวิจัยที่กล่าวไว้ข้างต้นแล้ว ข้าพเจ้าตกลงที่จะเข้าร่วมโครงการวิจัยนี้ และข้าพเจ้าได้รับสำเนาหนังสือแสดงเจตนายินยอมเข้าร่วมโครงการวิจัยนี้แล้ว

( \_\_\_\_\_ )  
ผู้เข้าร่วมโครงการวิจัย